DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 293 UD 029 030

AUTHOR	Snyder, Jon; And Others
TITLE	Makers of Meaning in a Learning-Centered School: A Case Study of Central Park East 1 Elementary School.
INSTITUTION	Columbia Univ., New York, NY. Teachers Coll. National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY	Aaron Diamond Foundation, Inc., New York, NY.; DeWitt Wallace / Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, N.Y.; Leon Lowenstein Foundation, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	Aug 92
NOTE	76p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Assessment; *Educational Environment; Elementary Education: *Elementary Schools; Inner City; *Nontraditional Education; Parent Participation; Public Schools; *Urban Schools; Urban Youth; Values
IDENTIFIERS	Descriptive Method; *Learner Centered Instruction; *New York City Board of Education

ABSTRACT

A case study was done of Central Park East Elementary School (CPE 1), in New York City, a school with a reputation for extraordinary work with students and their families in a student-centered environment. The study includes an overview of CPE 1 culled from the school's descriptions of itself and other public documents; a descriptive narrative of life in CPE 1 based on observations in classrooms, staff meetings, and school functions as well as focused conversations with school staff, parents, and other interested observers of the school; and an analysis of themes that are essential cultural characteristics of the CPE 1 community. The study concludes that CPE 1 holds a consistent core of common values about the nature of humanity and the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed. These values give rise to a conception of teaching and learning that depends on an environment in which all learners are persistent actors in the dramatic tension between the construction of personal meaning and public standards. This notion of teaching and learning is then translated into individually expressed norms for school and classroom activities and interactions. An appendix offers information on the descriptive review process used at CPE 1. Contains 14 references. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED355293

Case Studies

Makers of Meaning in a Learning-Centered School: A Case Study of Central Park East 1 Elementary School

Jon Snyder
Ann Lieberman
Maritza B. Macdonald
A. Lin Goodwin

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Harrington
NCREST
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD 029030

NCREST

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) was created to document, support, connect, and make lasting the many restructuring efforts going on throughout the nation.

Restructuring means creating schools that are learner-centered, knowledge-based, responsible, and responsive. To accomplish this, fundamental and comprehensive changes must be made in school governance, teaching practices, curriculum, parent and community involvement, assessment, and policy. We believe that no one of these changes will succeed or last unless all are accomplished.

Therefore, the Center brings together many voices: those of practitioners and researchers, parents and teachers and students, policy makers and teacher educators.

NCREST's work builds concrete, detailed knowledge about the intense and difficult efforts undertaken in restructuring schools. This knowledge is used to help others in their attempts at change, to begin to build future education programs for school practitioners, and to promote the environmental and policy changes that will nurture and encourage needed structural reforms.

NCREST is supported by a major grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. NCREST's work in New York City, through its Center for School Reform, is supported by the Leon Lowenstein Foundation and the Aaron Diamond Foundation.

Makers of Meaning in a Learning-Centered School:

A Case Study of

Central Park East 1 Elementary School

Makers of Meaning in a Learning-Centered School:

A Case Study of

Central Park East 1 Elementary School

A report by
Jon Snyder
Ann Lieberman
Maritza B. Macdonald
A. Lin Goodwin

August 1992

copyright © 1992

National Center for Restructuring
Education, Schools, and Teaching
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027

Acknowledgements

This case study is the work of many people. Jon Snyder, Director of Research at NCREST, was the principal author, pulling together the documentation and conceptualization of the other principal investigators, Ann Lieberman, Maritza B. Macdonald, and A. Lin Goodwin.

The staff at Central Park East 1 Elementary School has been unfailingly welcoming, supportive, and critical in the most positive sense. We thank especially Lucy Matos, Alice Seletsky, Dot Peters, and Vivian Wallace for their extensive feedback. At the Center for Collaborative Education, Priscilla Ellington and Heather Lewis smoothed the way whenever it got rough and enabled the work to get done. Deborah Meier's extraordinary vision and leadership really made this project possible, and we thank her.

Another source of support throughout the writing of this case study was the N.Y.C. Documenters' Study Group, especially Kathe Gervis, David Bensman, and Janet Carter, who helped clarify the ideas and words.

At NCREST, editors Elizabeth Lesnick and Diane Harrington polished the draft and produced this volume.

Contents

Introduction	**1**
December Monday	**13**
February Wednesday	**29**
Values	**45**
Organizational Themes	**55**
Epilogue: The Following September	**69**
References	**73**
Appendix: Descriptive Review Process	**74**

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Central Park East Elementary School (CPE 1) has a well-deserved reputation for extraordinary work with students and their families. Educators and those interested in education flock from around the country to observe what the school does and how. In simplest terms, people are interested in CPE 1 because it works. Of the 116 members of its five initial sixth grade classes contacted in a follow-up study, 98 graduated from high school and another 14 received a GED (Bensman, 1992) -- a 97% graduation rate in a city where the average graduation rate hovers around 50%. Currently, the waiting list of parents from all socio-economic levels and all races eager for their children to enroll in CPE numbers in the hundreds. At a time when most communities are initiating some effort toward centering their schools around children, the CPE 1 example is of the utmost importance. An in-depth, yet accessible, description and analysis of a school that has carved excellence out of the seeming chaos of change may provide the kind of knowledge and understandings needed to guide the vast array of concerned citizens who find themselves sometimes groping in the darkness as they attempt to invent the future.

This case study, in some detail, describes what CPE 1 is and what makes it possible. The school is described in three ways: (a) an overview of CPE 1 culled from the school's descriptions of itself and other public documents; (b) descriptive narratives of "life in CPE 1," based on observations in classrooms, staff meetings, and school functions as well as focused conversations with school staff, parents, and other interested observers of the school; and (c) an analysis of seven themes we have come to believe are essential cultural characteristics of the CPE 1 community. The combination of the three sections is meant to be a sympathetic description of CPE 1 from a variety of perspectives. The result is a vision of the school at a particular point in time. CPE 1 was not the way herein described yesterday, nor is this the way it will be tomorrow. Like all human endeavors, CPE 1 is a dynamic enterprise.

History and Philosophy

With the support of New York Community School District Four Superintendent Anthony Alvarado, Central Park East Elementary School (CPE 1) was founded in 1974 by Deborah Meier and a corps of teachers who were members of New York City's Open Education Network headed by Lillian Weber. At the time, the East Harlem district was considered one of the worst in the city, whether the measure used was test scores, dropout rates, or community attitudes toward the schools. One of Alvarado's change strategies was to open school sites to teachers with compelling educational visions. CPE 1 was one of the first products of that strategy.

The original vision was a staff-run alternative school grounded in the pedagogy of open education: classrooms where the individual interests and strengths of students would be

nurtured, extended, and enriched. The school would be designed with the student at its center. Teachers would be selected based upon the ability to actualize this basic premise. Teaching and learning would be based on student strengths, interests, and needs and thus, by design, be different within and between classrooms. Students and teachers in each classroom would be allowed to construct environments in tune with the way people learn: as active makers of meaning rather than passive mugs to be filled from a common jug. The purpose of staff development would be to enhance teacher skills in facilitating children's instinctive desire and ability to make sense of their lives within a social context. Governance and decision making would always be in the hands of the teachers, because of all school personnel, they are closest to and have the most opportunities to know students.

The school opened with an enrollment of approximately 60 children in two kindergarten/first grade classes and two primary grade classes, with a plan to add an additional grade each year. During the first two years, Meier served as teacher-director. In the third year of CPE's existence, Meier left the classroom to become a full-time director. By 1980, CPE's reputation had advanced to the point that a second school (CPE 2) was opened to accommodate the overflow of applicants while maintaining the small size deemed essential by the learning-centered vision. Meier originally directed both schools, but by spring of 1983 CPE 2 hired its own full-time director. In 1981 a third school, River East, was opened as another member of the CPE family of elementary schools. The three elementary schools, though sharing a core philosophy, are not clones. Each of the three has a unique identity all its own. (For a fuller description of the history of CPE, see Bensman, 1987.)

Neighborhood and School Building

In 1985, CPE 1 moved to its present location at 106th Street and Madison Avenue. At this time, Meier founded and became director of Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS), an alternative secondary school (7-12) based on the same philosophy as the CPE elementary schools. Lucy Matos, a classroom teacher at both CPE 1 and CPE 2, became the director of CPE 1. The East Harlem neighborhood in which CPE 1 resides is predominantly residential with housing projects and small apartment buildings occupied primarily by lower to middle-class Latino and African-American families. Within a three-block radius of the school, there are two other public elementary schools, two hospitals, several major museums, and numerous small shops and bodegas.

The building itself, a former junior high school, was built in 1958 and could never be mistaken for anything but a school. It is a traditional egg crate structure with five floors including the basement. The building houses CPE 1, CPESS, and two other alternative programs, Music 13 and the Creative Learning Center. Of the 40 classrooms in the building, CPE 1 occupies ten on the second and third floors. CPE 1 also shares the gymnasium, cafeteria, two libraries, auditorium, art room, a converted classroom used as a music room, and the outside playyard with the other programs housed in the building.

Students and Families

Currently, CPE 1 is home to approximately 280 students from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade. Though a public school operating within the same financial and contractual constraints as other schools in the city, families must choose to send their children there. Because of its national renown as well as the school's commitment to a heterogeneous student population, CPE 1 has a relatively complex lottery admissions system. Children from the neighborhood are given first priority and remaining ethnic slots (e.g., equal proportions of African-Americans, Latino-Americans, and "others") are filled by random drawing. When a child's name is drawn, all other siblings are automatically admitted to the school. At no point in the process, to the consternation of some applicants, is academic ability, socio-economic class, or political clout taken into account. The two exceptions to the process are the admission of children of the staff and siblings of attending students. While CPE 1 has a higher percentage of "special needs" children than other elementary schools in the district, school facilities do not allow for the needs of severely challenged students to be met. After a family's name is selected in the lottery, guardian and child are required to visit the school, and invited to spend a day there and have a personal conversation with the director. Observation guidelines are provided for their visit. If, at the end of this process, the family indicates that CPE 1 is the right environment for them, they become members of the CPE 1 community.

The admissions process engages families in the school life of their children at its inception. This helps build a commitment to the school and its philosophy, which is systematically furthered through the following:

- twice yearly family conferences.
- twice yearly detailed narrative reports.
- phone calls.
- weekly classroom newsletters.
- parent visitations.
- community outreach.
- schoolwide performances and events.
- collection of student work in folders, which are open to parents.

Teachers sometimes feel they need to pay greater attention to parent concerns because families must choose to send their children there. Thus, to some degree, the school's very existence is dependent upon parental support.

Most importantly, the school's focused and consistent attention to the needs of individual children engenders a high level of parent participation. CPE 1 parents know their children are safe, trusted, and respected. When they leave family conferences, they can be heard wondering aloud, "How does she (the teacher) know so much about my child? How does she remember so much? How can she care so much?"

Staff and Staffing

All the CPE schools operate primarily on regular tax-levy funds, with the same per capita costs as any other school in their district. Their class sizes and support staff are therefore the same as other schools'. Since they use their staff and funds somewhat differently, however, they are able to provide different activities and opportunities for students and teachers. Though costs are roughly the same as other schools', CPE 1 provides a qualitatively different educational experience.

There are ten classroom teachers at CPE 1: three males and seven females, two Latino-Americans, two African-Americans, and six European-Americans. Only Lucy Matos (director) and one other teacher from 1974 remain. Two joined the staff during the school's reorganization in its third year. Two were student teachers at the school, and the remaining five joined the staff after teaching at other schools in New York City. In addition to the classroom teachers, there is a full-time music teacher, a full-time art teacher, two full-time resource room teachers, and a part-time school psychologist. There are five non-certified support personnel: three work with primary grade teachers and two provide office support. There are two full-time administrative positions, director and assistant director, both filled by teachers.

The most visible difference in staffing is CPE's use of mixed age groupings. Students usually spend two years with a teacher in first/second, third/fourth, and fifth/sixth grade groupings, depending upon numbers. Because of the resulting broad range of student competencies, there are many opportunities for alternate grouping strategies within one class. In this way, CPE 1 can avoid tracking, labeling, and retaining students who, in some areas, are developing more slowly than their peers. These alternate grouping strategies increase the possibility of such proven approaches as peer tutoring, construction of curriculum around themes, additional time for exploration with concrete materials, and student choice in the areas of what, how, and with whom to learn.

According to staff members, spending two years with a teacher enhances continuity for students, families, and teachers as well as allowing teachers to be accountable. Working relationships are improved as children and the important people in their educational lives have the time, and responsibility, to get to know each other better. With two years to work with students, the sense of "too little time before we pass them on" is decreased. In addition, long-range developmentally appropriate strategies built around the strengths and needs of individual students, rather than grade levels, can be devised and implemented.

Curriculum

A child-centered curriculum demands several significant alterations in the traditional uses of space and time in classrooms. There is, for instance, no front of the class in CPE

schools from which the teacher addresses rows of student chairs. Rather, each room at CPE centers on a meeting area where each day begins and ends. Located around that area are a variety of materials for student use and appropriate spaces in which to work with them. There may be an open floor space for building mathematical models, a table with an outlet or batteries for completing electrical circuits, a cooking area with utensils and appliances (e.g., refrigerator, oven), or a sink surrounded by clay, wood, paper, straw, and rocks for floating and sinking experiments. Students use these spaces and materials in small groups or individually. At any given time, one student may be writing in his/her journal bordered on one side by a twosome stuffing an animal and on the other by a group building a three-dimensional map of the Middle East.

To someone unfamiliar with the philosophy or the students around whom the curriculum is constructed, the day may appear chaotic, but in reality, time and space at CPE have a definite, if personalized, structure. Each room posts the daily work plan and enforces expectations of appropriate student behavior. Class meetings, which begin and end each day, preview and review the day's process and progress.

The content of the curriculum is structured around interdisciplinary themes extending anywhere from two months to a full academic year. Themes have included birds, ancient China, Shakespearean England, marine biology, bridges, Africa, Greek mythology, the neighborhood, the human body, and families. Teachers sometimes research and design topics because of personal passion or interest, thus helping to maintain an intellectually stimulated and up-to-date teaching staff. Just as often the themes come from the children themselves. Regardless of who suggests the theme, selection criteria are (1) interest to the children with whom they work; (2) possibility of in-depth investigation; (3) relevance to real-life issues in the community, nation, and world; and (4) the opportunity to apply varied knowledge, skills, and attitudes from content areas (e.g., math, science, reading, writing, social studies, art, music). At the heart of each of these themes is the enhancement of learning, of the meaningful construction of knowledge (Bradekamp, 1987; Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, and Klausner, 1985; Katz, 1989; National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 1989; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1989).

The last criterion is noteworthy as basic concepts and skills of traditional content areas are woven into each theme. In this way, CPE 1 curricula "cover" the requirements imposed by State and District policies without allowing them to determine practice. Even though CPE 1 is a non-traditional alternative school using other, more authentic, mechanisms to hold itself accountable, the school and its students are still held accountable by traditional mechanisms. CPE 1, like other schools in New York City, has to administer standardized tests and have its name and ranking published in the newspaper.[1]

---

[1] CPE 1's name does not appear in the public ranking of city schools. Its scores are embedded within another school's scores. As a "program" without a supervised principal, CPE 1 is not considered an "official" school by the Board of Education.

It would be incorrect, however, to assume that CPE 1 neither values nor teaches "basic skills." It is just that the notion of what is basic has been expanded. In the words of a teacher, "The teaching and learning of basic skills run deeper than reading, writing, and math." Skills work is integrated into class themes in order for students to receive on-the-spot instruction at the most appropriate moments with immediate opportunity for meaningful applications. By contextualizing skills, students see the need for and value of those skills. In addition, since not all skills neatly fit into the theme/project approach, basic skills are also taught in frequently changing small groups of children with common needs as well as in individual tutorial sessions.

Since each teacher and class design their own day, there is no such thing as an "average" day, but the following outline provides a general sense of how CPE 1's nontraditional structuring of time, space, and subject matter looks in practice.

8:00-8:30
Breakfast served in the school cafeteria.

8:30-9:00
Most classes start with a class meeting. Students gather with the teacher in an area of the room created for just this kind of open and equal communication. They review the previous day and preview upcoming processes and activities. Some start with quiet reading or journal writing. The chorus also meets during this time.

9:00-12:00
This is the heart of the day when the widest range and variety of work occurs. In most classes, this is theme/project time when the on-going interdisciplinary themes described above are carried out. Common activities include cooking, woodworking, painting, constructing models, conducting surveys, writing reports, researching, measuring, working in math groups, reading and writing stories, and conducting interviews. Children work alone and in small groups -- by themselves and with a teacher or student teacher.

Also during this time, some students practice specific skills, working with the resource room teacher or meeting with teachers for coaching, counseling, or accountability checks (where teachers and students meet individually or in small groups to jointly assess student growth and development).

12:00-1:00
Lunch for the entire school is served family style, with the older children assisting the younger ones. A short outdoor play time or an all-school sing follows lunch.

1:00-2:30
This is the second major work period of the day. In upper grades, silent reading or a writer's workshop (e.g., peer editing groups to assist in the revision of writing) may

start the afternoon. Those who did not have a formal math period in the morning work period may have one now. Other rooms continue with morning projects.

Toward the end of the afternoon, there is a "break time" with snacks in the early grades and supervised physical activities for the older students.

2:30-3:00
The last half hour of the day is devoted to a final meeting to review and preview, hear a story, sing or share ideas together, and distribute any notices that must go home. On Wednesdays, primary and intermediate classes have joint activities to provide additional meeting time for the staff.

At various times throughout the day, groups and individuals are scheduled for a variety of special programs including: library, gym, music instruction, dance and movement, drama, art, individual resource room tutoring, and poetry. One area, music instruction, includes music class once a week, all-school sing, primary school sing, boys chorus and girls chorus, violin and recorder lessons, and an opera production each year. These "special" programs are integral to the curriculum of the school. They help provide unity to the themes while building math, reading, science, and social studies skills. Writing, producing, constructing the sets, creating the costumes, and performing a musical dramatization of a piece of historical fiction each require motivating and authentic application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of all the traditional school subjects. Of equal importance, the "special" programs express a valuing of the arts as a tool for human expression. In addition, they bring children from different classes together.

Students also take frequent trips -- sometimes with the whole class, sometimes with a small group. These are usually connected with a unit of study or a service activity (e.g., working with a home for senior citizens). For the older students, there is an extended camping program. All classes make use of such nearby resources as Central Park (e.g., nature study, ice skating, the zoo, Belvedere Castle), Lincoln Center, and numerous nearby museums (e.g., the Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museo Del Barrio, the Museum of the City of New York).

CPE 1's curriculum demands a nontraditional conception of the role of the teacher. Teachers in a learning-centered school, for example, do not provide right answers but shape questions instead. They are resource people, facilitators, guides, and models. These alternative teacher roles do include, however, the traditional role of responsible adult who holds high behavioral and academic expectations and sets standards. The teacher at CPE 1 is still the teacher with all that role entails. Because learners construct their own knowledge -- and are able to do so -- teachers at CPE 1 provide the opportunities, guidance, and support for learners to find their own answers to questions jointly formulated by students and teachers.

Student Assessment

CPE 1 utilizes three general approaches to student assessment: (1) tests and test-like events; (2) teacher observations; and (3) analysis of student work samples. CPE 1 does administer standardized tests as required by the city and state. While not overemphasizing their significance, students are provided with opportunities to practice test-taking skills (i.e., how to fill in multiple choice answer sheets) so that they can handle such experiences comfortably. In addition, within the context of the ongoing curriculum of each class, students exhibit their knowledge in formats similar to traditional classroom assessment and testing.

Of greater importance to assessment of student development, however, is the use of teacher observations and student work samples. Teachers, prepared and supported in systematic observation of children, keep voluminous documentation of what children do and say, the choices they make, their physical mannerisms and growth, personality dispositions, and relationships with other children and adults. This information is enriched by interviews with families and students and by Descriptive Reviews, as well as by classroom conferences and interactions. This data, always available to parents in its entirety, is summarized in twice-yearly narrative reports to parents. The data is also summarized for the child's school folder, which, over the course of a child's years at CPE 1, becomes a remarkable, in depth case study of each child's growth and development.

In addition, teachers save, describe, and analyze samples of student work, following the common sense notion that if one wants to know, for instance, how a child's writing ability is progressing, the best way to tell is to look at the child's writing over time. The students themselves assist in the collection of their work -- maintaining folders for math, writing, and reading logs, as well as samples of art work and research. In this way, they assume responsibility for assessing their own growth. Another assessment approach used in many middle and upper-grade classrooms is the "museum." At the end of a unit, students from other classrooms and interested adults come into the "museum" for a tour of the exhibits, drawings, plays, and demonstrations that the "curators" have created to explain what they have learned. The systematic collection, description, analysis, and reporting of a variety of data provides students, parents, and teachers with a rich base for understanding the child's school progress.

Governance/Staff Development

In most schools, associating governance with staff development would be an odd coupling. At CPE 1, long-range planning as well as the day-to-day mechanics of running the school are shared by all staff. The collaborative governance process becomes an ongoing staff development effort for creating a collegial professional environment. With the function of the school defined as meeting the needs of students, all school issues ultimately revolve

around the ability of the staff to meet those needs. Thus, most school decision-making processes are staff development activities because they make school practices visible and create opportunities for teachers to jointly reflect on their practices, expanding their perspectives on what is happening and what is possible. These processes help develop and maintain a shared vision for staff and consistency for students. They provide, notes the director, a "collective sense of taking care of kids," as well as forums for the staff to learn from one another. Specific structures coupling governance and staff development include the following:

- weekly conferences between the director and individual teachers.
- Wednesday afternoon (2:15-3:00) staff "business" meetings.
- Monday afternoon (3:00-5:00) descriptive reviews of children or curriculum.
- semiannual off-site retreats from noon Friday through Saturday.
- full-day, district-sponsored staff development days designed by the staff several times each year.

Making school practices visible is enhanced by three factors. First is the commitment of teachers. It takes more time and energy to reach decisions by consensus and to collaboratively construct "big pictures and next steps," than to follow bureaucratic procedures and "let the boss" make decisions. Second, the school must be small. In order to assume collective responsibility, people must know, respect, and trust one another. CPE 1 is home to 280 children with a professional staff of 14 full-time employees. Even with these small numbers (by public school standards) it takes conscious effort for all staff and all students to come to know, respect, and trust one another. Moreover, coordinating schedules and finding time for collaborative work is a constant struggle.

Third, even though teachers "manage" the school, administrative roles are crucial. In the first years of CPE 1, Meier was a "teacher-director" in order to reduce class size. The staff ultimately decided to hire a full-time administrator because they found that they needed managerial support of their instructional efforts more than smaller classes. At that time, only Meier was willing to assume such a role and the inevitable hassles of negotiating the program's relationships with the district office and other agencies for essential school resources. The current teacher-director works as a full-time administrator, but operates from a teacher contract, has no official supervisory (e.g., evaluative) duties, and does not possess supervisory credentials.

External Collaborative Connections

In addition to internally collaborative staff development activities, CPE 1 has always been involved with external collaborations as well as with such places as City College, the sister CPE schools, the Center for Collaborative Education, the Ackerman Institute, Prospect Center, the Task Force on AIDS, Lehman College, and the North Dakota Study Group. In

its early years perhaps the most important collaboration was with Lillian Weber's Workshop on Open Education operating out of City College. As the initial CPE school expanded into three elementary schools (CPE 1, CPE 2, and River East) and a secondary school (CPESS), they have remained in frequent consultation with each other. They cooperate in running staff development, parent workshops, and transportation services. In addition, recruitment and admissions are handled jointly by the three elementary schools. Graduates of the elementary schools are automatically accepted into CPESS.

The four CPE schools have now established a network of alternative programs located throughout New York City called the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE). CCE sponsors numerous opportunities for staff development (e.g., a city-wide conference and specialized projects in such areas as parent involvement, student assessment, and reconceptualization of the content and process of math instruction) and staff support (e.g., monthly directors' support group meetings). CCE has recently become the New York City affiliate of the national Coalition of Essential Schools[2], which is likely to bring more support to the school.

CPE 1 also has had a collaborative working relationship with the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont, for many years (see Appendix for further information on the Center). Staff members have attended weekend seminars as well as the two-week Summer Institutes. One product of that relationship is the Monday afternoon Descriptive Review. A collaborative relationship with the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy, an organization conceived by Arthur Maslow and headed by Howard Weiss, has helped shape the nature of the family conferences that are an essential element of CPE 1's home-school partnership. Teachers and directors attend yearly meetings of the North Dakota Study Group, a small band of progressive educators founded by Vito Perrone. They find the sharing of dreams and dilemmas to be both supportive and enlightening.

Whether it is an internal or external collaboration, however, the purpose of all staff development and networking is to enhance the possibility of meeting the needs of learners and to enrich the development of each learner in the CPE 1 community. Thus, in all that it does and all that it hopes to become, CPE 1 revisits and revises its philosophy. From the size of the school to the selection of the staff; from the content of the curriculum to the structuring of time and space; from two teachers chatting in the classroom to national networks in convention centers, CPE 1 is about kids -- and the kid in all of us that embodies wonder, growth, and care.

---

[2] The Coalition of Essential Schools is a federation of high schools from around the country with a central staff, chaired by Theodore Sizer, associated with Brown University. Within a common set of principles, the direction of each school remains unequivocally in the hands of local authorities. The principal obligations of the Coalition are to provide intellectual leadership and professional support to the efforts of member schools.

CHAPTER TWO

DECEMBER MONDAY

The incidents in this and the following chapter did not occur on one day or necessarily in the order presented. They are derived from numerous observations by three observers on many different days during the 1990-91 school year. Each incident did, however, happen as described. If any day in CPE 1 can be considered typical, these composite incidents represent such days. Some of the teacher quotations were taken from interviews, from public statements, or from informal conversations. Places where the author seems to be "inside the teacher's head" or knowledgeable about people's feelings are drawn from post-incident discussions. Throughout these accounts, the teachers' names are their own while the names of students have been changed.

7:00 AM - 12:00 Noon

The sky is still dark, and the exhaust from cars forms a smoky haze in the bitter winter air when Bruce, an Anglo fifth/sixth grade teacher, arrives at school. Before entering the building, he stops at the store across the street to buy film and to replenish the class refrigerator with cooking supplies. Though not as busy as it will be later when children crowd in to stock up on gum, candy, and the latest fad in junk food, the store is already bustling. Grease rises in angry hisses of steam as orders are made for fried egg sandwiches and inside jokes are shouted back and forth. As does everyone else in the store, Bruce speaks Spanish as he jokes and is the butt of jokes. He leaves smiling at the parting salvos.

Three six- or seven-year-old children watch their breath mix with the exhaust from cars fuming at the red light. They wait patiently for Bruce to enter so they can follow him into his classroom. They are not in his class; he does not remember exactly how it is that they have come to wait for him each morning. Still, there they are, and he explains it to himself as "an extended family sort of thing." Once inside, while Bruce writes the daily schedule on the flip chart and takes mental notes on student progress on projects (which he will collect on his computer at home this evening), the children play "Magnetic Dimension," a magnetized shape game. As his work brings him near the children, he pauses to ask questions or offer encouragement.

Over the weekend, Bruce prepared his weekly letter home to students and their families. It describes the week's activities as well as significant upcoming events like the winter concert and "Bruce's Diner," a fund-raising effort for the class' spring trip. On the back page of the letter are the week's homework assignments. The fifth and sixth graders have four homework assignments for the upcoming week.

> **Assignment 1**: Please write out what you think is meant by a "celebration of mosaic." Give it a lot of thought. Think about the things we talked about when we discussed "mosaic." This is due on Friday.

Assignment 2: Be sure you turn in your newspaper article about garbage. We'll need a news crew to get the newspaper ready. We will need several cartoons too, and designs for the heading.

Assignment 3: Write a law that you think would help us to deal with the problem of garbage in New York City and in the United States. [There is currently the threat of a garbage strike in the city.] This is due next Monday.

Assignment 4: Read the enclosed article entitled "Don't Just Flush It." Answer these questions: What is raw sewage? What happens to the water after you've flushed it? What happens in primary sedimentation tanks? How do bacteria help get rid of waste? What are some of the things you shouldn't use the toilet for? Can you draw a diagram showing what happens to the water from the toilet after it's been flushed?

The homework assignments for the week are followed by a cartoon, several reminders, and finally a personal space where Bruce has written homework assignments still outstanding, and class and project work completed and not completed from the previous week. Three students have significant homework remaining, and Bruce is worried. One student in particular weighs heavily on his mind this morning: "There are so many things going on in that kid's life and head. What's important? How can I help him? Still, he has to do that homework."

As Bruce worries and prepares for the day (vacuuming, straightening up the room), other teachers enter the building. Vivian, a kindergarten/first grade teacher, stops in to ask if Bruce remembers what they decided to do at the Thursday morning student-teacher meeting. Vivian has assumed responsibility for the staff's decision to offer a formal weekly meeting to help student teachers understand what CPE 1 teachers do and why they do it. On this day, she is looking for a tape of a child reading to a teacher used by the staff to enrich their understanding of how children learn to read and how to assess and report reading development. Bruce has not seen the tape recently, but says that maybe Lucy, the director of the school, knows where it is.

Vivian sets off in search of Lucy. She is easy to find since today is one of Lucy's cafeteria mornings. In past years, finding her at this hour would have been a challenge, for she would have been meeting with an individual teacher in his or her classroom. For years, Lucy met weekly with every teacher on the staff in half-hour individual conferences that were sacred and never to be sacrificed. During the past year, however, the staff became increasingly dissatisfied with the nature of their students' breakfast experience. The building that houses CPE 1 also houses CPE Secondary School (CPESS), so the cafeteria often became a riotous mixture of ages, voices, and physical presences. In order to start the morning on a more "civilized" note, they reorganized the program so that Lucy and two teachers could alternate mornings in the cafeteria. Thus, the individual meetings with Lucy and the teachers no longer occur as frequently as in the past. Teachers miss the meeting

time since Lucy not only intimately knows every child and family in the school, but also has an uncanny intuitive sense of student strengths and how to build curriculum around those strengths.

Unfortunately for Vivian, Lucy has not seen the videotape. Vivian gives up the search for the moment and chats smilingly with the students who have gathered around her like straight pins around a powerful magnet. At 8:30 she leads her brood through the hallway and up to the end of the second floor to their classroom. On the way, she passes Bruce's room. His class, except for two boys, is at music and art at the moment. Bruce is reprimanding the boys: "Get yourself active. I can't stand to see you vegetating." As he turns away, he casually tosses several comic books in their direction, as if an afterthought. The boys leap for them, "Oh boy, comics!" and begin reading. These are Golden Legacy comics from the early 1970s on the lives of Frederick Douglass, Benjamen Banneker, Walter White, Thurgood Marshall, and Roy Wilkins. As Bruce returns to writing narrative reports to families, Vivian catches his eye and asks if he could check around for the tape. Her K/1 students gape wide-eyed at the animals (living and dead) Bruce has arranged around the classroom. Some of the young ones are scared, others are fascinated, but all are keenly attentive. Bruce enjoys the scene and salutes several of the children by name as he tells Vivian he will check with Alice, another fifth/sixth grade teacher.

Alice's classroom is on a different floor of the building. At this moment, her class is gathered on the rug having its morning meeting. Most classes at CPE 1 begin each day with such a meeting. With the winter holiday rapidly approaching, Alice's class meeting turns its attention to the question of homework during the vacation -- a subject of passionate interest for Alice and students alike. Alice argues that the students must remain connected to some of their work during vacation or else too much time is spent reorienting them when school resumes. Some of the students, by this time in their CPE 1 schooling quite aware of their own work and study habits, argue for a very small amount of homework. They recognize that they will most likely leave it until the last minute and then be unable to complete it all. Other students, to the accompaniment of groans from the first group, argue for a large amount of homework so that they will have "something to do" on boring days.

The class decides to research the issue. A small group volunteers to develop a parent survey to elicit information for their homework policy deliberations. Following the meeting, six children start to design the survey during project time. Other students are using the whole gamut of resources present in the room for their projects. As part of a unit on families, several children are working on elaborate personal coat of arms flags. Several other children have gone to the art room on the second floor to complete painting and ceramic work begun last week. Alice moves nonstop among groups teaching, suggesting, reminding, cajoling, and helping.

At the cooking center, two students, through an amazingly complex measuring system, find themselves an eighth of a cup of milk shy of what the recipe calls for. When asked what they should do, Alice returns the question. They find the measuring cup, fill it

to the one quarter cup mark and then pour half of that into the bowl. Alice waits attentively, but silently, until the students figure it out.

Across the room Alice notices a child unable to make up his mind about what to do at the loom. Alice asks, "How do you solve this problem in the art room?" The child explains that first they have a choice and if they can't decide, they must choose between two teacher-provided options. Alice tells him he can do some weaving or make a wall hanging. The boy says he wants to weave but does not know how. Alice sits with him, modeling the loom's set up and operation until he is able to work independently.

A group of students, males and females, walk in from the corridor in search of pencil and paper. They have been experimenting with catching a ball while covering one eye. They are trying to determine if gender or dominant hand makes any difference in catching ability. Alice asks about the relationship among the eye covered, the dominant hand, and catching ability. The individuals offer a variety of hypotheses before heading back to the hallway. Armed with pencil and graph paper, they call back, "We'll have to do this a lot to get a large sample."

It has taken less than ten minutes for Alice to see that projects are being moved along and that every student is working on agreed-upon curriculum goals; now she is able to join the homework research group. They have three questions ready:

1. Do you think your child should get homework during vacation?
2. If so, how much time is appropriate?
3. What is a fair punishment for your child if he or she doesn't do the homework?

Alice sits down to assist in phrasing the questions, but they are doing just fine without her, so she scans the room. She remembers that one of the girls came to school with a button missing from her skirt. She has neither heard nor seen any teasing of the young woman, but she senses her discomfort. The student is conscious of the missing button and trying hard to organize her movements so that it will not be noticeable -- holding the skirt in place as she moves, wrapping it and tacking it in place with a book when she sits.

Unnoticed by the class, Alice sweeps a button, needle, and thread from the sewing table. Taking the girl silently aside, she shows her how to sew on a button. Neither she nor the child give the incident much thought. It was not, to them, a big deal, just something people do for each other when they care. Alice is also keeping an eye on one of her boys who had been part of a family conference that morning. Although Alice felt the interchange among child, parent, and teacher had been frank and productive, unresolved issues and lingering tensions remained. Sixth grade is a time of accumulating personal responsibility and hormonal changes, and she feels the need to balance her adult perspective with that of a sixth grade child. "Look for the cracks," she remembers Lillian Weber telling her. "Look for the cracks."

In Vivian's room of five and six year olds on the second floor, project time is just beginning after morning meeting. The class transited from flush-faced recess to work time with one of their favorite songs, "The More We Get Together, The Happier We'll Be." Once students are attentive, Vivian makes each one assume responsibility for a project, whether working alone or with a group, by publicly stating his/her choice. This is exactly the same reinforcement of individual responsibility that was carried out earlier in Alice's room and will be enacted later in Bruce's room down the hall. Though the projects of the ten and eleven year olds in Bruce's and Alice's classes are quite different from those of the five and six year olds in Vivian's, each student in those classes has to publicly accept responsibility for what he or she will be doing that day.

After everyone has publicly selected a project, students leave the carpeted meeting area in the center of the room and spread out like the spokes of a wheel to the tasks at hand. Several of the children, however, seem to lose their sense of purpose and direction before they arrive at their chosen destination fifteen paces away. One in particular seems to meander with unfathomable purpose from blockbuilding, to the playhouse, past the cooking center (poking a finger in the dough along the way). He taps the writing table, pauses momentarily to watch the painters and the clay workers, before physically examining the Legos and Unifix cubes for a minute and then moving in the general direction of the sandbox. Vivian waits actively for an opportunity to intervene appropriately. After he seems to have scanned the entire universe of possiblities, she tells him, "You have a few more minutes to decide, and then I will have to make a choice for you." The child retraces his path with his eyes before looking toward the one project he did not pass. He heads to the book-making project where a student teacher is working with a group of children making cloth and cardboard book covers. The student teacher smiles a welcome, and the boy busily joins the activity.

Vivian moves from area to area, taking her time observing children's work, recording their choices, asking them what they are trying to do, and making suggestions for next steps in their work. In the cooking area, two children are making cookies for snack. These cookies are to be a special surprise for the student teacher who will be leaving CPE 1 today. The cooking is going fine, but a young boy is fiddling frustratedly with an egg beater at the water table. Vivian suggests that a screwdriver might help. He spends a good 15 minutes realigning the gears until they work. Very pleased with himself, he makes certain he returns both the screwdriver and the egg beater to their appropriate storage spaces and then hurries to share his success with Vivian.

Before he can get to Vivian, the fire alarm rings, and the entire class, with minimum fuss, winds its way down the stairwell and out onto Madison Avenue with the rest of the students, rambunctious beneath a surface veneer of patient calm. Yvonne, a teacher of four and five year olds stands with her class next to Vivian and is very stern as she leads her students back into the school. As they enter the classroom, the students, with an intent maturity remarkable for this age group, return to their projects. One young boy, Tony, walks over to Yvonne's closet, opens the door, and, standing on a chair, looks at himself in

the mirror inside. Yvonne notices and grins, "You're looking good today, Tony." Tony smiles in agreement, puts the chair away, and closes the door.

Two cooks come running excitedly up to Yvonne yelling, "We don't have enough flour!" Yvonne suggests looking in the cannister. Across the room, a child (Josh) in the block area has stacked three large milk crates and is climbing onto them in order to build a "skyscraper." Yvonne, unobtrusively, walks toward him, stopping on the other side of the bookshelf from the precariously perched child. Her eyes are attentively attached to Josh, but she is not hovering. Josh does not even know she is near. As he establishes a secure balance and method for continuing his building, Yvonne moves to the "Bear House," an open doll's house about as high as a five-year-old child, where several boys have discovered that the furniture in the house actually works. Yvonne is chuckling aloud and calls to the paraprofessional to come look. One quarter of her left eye is still visibly connected to Josh on the crates. "There's been a revolution in the Bear House," she laughs. Fuzzy baby owls are in the bath tub, and the bears are seesawing.

Josh is now, once again, teetering on the brink of disaster as he attempts to fit a roof on his structure. This time Yvonne, still without saying anything, stands next to him. The "Bear House Boys" come up to Yvonne and pull her hand to show what they have just done. Calling them by their names, as always -- names are magic -- she tells them, "I cannot leave Josh right now. He is putting on his roof. As soon as Josh finishes putting on his roof, I will come." The boys play with wooden toys on the book shelf as they wait quietly. When Josh finishes, Yvonne walks with the boys to see their latest work, holding their hands on the way. The paraprofessional turns off the lights as a signal to freeze and reminds the student workers that they have five minutes to clean up before lunch. Yvonne and the "Bear House Boys" immediately freeze. Two children on the other side of the room do not. With the lights still off, Yvonne quietly repeats the directions. "We will meet in the big library (the large meeting area) as soon as you have cleaned up. Julian, I'd like to give you a sponge to wipe off the puzzle table." As the children clean up, two boys sing "We Shall Overcome" *sotto voce* in time to their rhythmic washing of paint brushes.

The thought of his own lunch must have reminded Adam that it is feeding time for the guinea pig. He tries to peel a tangerine while simultaneously lifting two guinea pigs from their tank. A second boy stops on his way to the big library and matter of factly takes out both pigs and holds them. Adam turns to another adult in the room and asks her for help with the peeling. A third child intervenes, "I'll help." Adam and his helpers are pleased with the situation. Children in CPE 1 classrooms help each other and ask each other for help constantly. This is not accidental. CPE 1 staff made a conscious schoolwide decision over a decade ago that in this school students would be responsible for themselves *and* for each other. That is community. That, they said, is what CPE 1 is supposed to be about. Since then they have questioned their decision regularly, most recently several weeks ago. The concern is not that students are not asking teachers for help, but that they may help each other too much. Sometimes, before they try to solve a problem individually, they ask their peers. Students, they fear, may not be learning to use their own internal resources. "Have

we created a monster here?" Teachers continue to create methods aimed at establishing a better balance between students asking other students -- or teachers -- for immediate help and taking time and effort to figure things out for themselves. For example, when a student asks Alice or Dot for assistance, the child is required to spend five minutes working individually. If, after that time, the child still does not "get it," then the teacher intervenes.

As Yvonne leads her class into the lunch room, she chats with Alice. Alice is looking over Yvonne's shoulder as they speak, seeking the girl with the previously missing button. When Alice spies her, she is twirling as she sits down to eat, button and self-confidence intact. Yvonne and Alice leave the lunchroom together, but Alice peels off into the music room. She explains to the music teacher that one of the boys may be a little distracted because of the family conference that morning. He seemed, she thought, a little out of sorts all morning.

1:00 - 3:00 PM

After lunch, Bruce's fifth/sixth grade class is preparing for math. There are five math groups, each with an activity booklet Bruce has created. The groups, heterogeneously mixed, meet in separate areas around the room. All group members do all the activities in the booklet and are expected to help each other. Each child, however, is at a different section in the unit. One group works on a booklet with various tangram activities built around the concept of fractions. A second group works on time lines. The assigned time lines include a range of time frames and subject matter, including a personal history, a history of the world, African history, and a time line to be constructed from a list of significant events generated by each student. For the last assignment, a student generates events ranging from her own birthday and her brother's to the earliest existence of crude tools. As she sits down to create her scale, she discovers a problem. She would need, she explains to a colleague, a piece of paper "from here to the park" and still the two birthdays would be indistinguishably close. She decides to drop her brother's birthday and add an event from Greek history heard about from friends in Alice's class.

Individuals in the third math group are rolling one die and two dice, and tossing from one to four pennies. From the results, they chart probabilities and answer questions demanding application of their charts to known card games as well as to novel situations. A fourth math group is completing a stack of traditional decimal worksheets. Bruce himself works with a fifth group trying to match shapes using double tangrams. As they struggle, Bruce struggles with them. "I have to admit, I'm having a little trouble visualizing this," says Bruce as he scratches his head. The activities are not exercises for which the students already have a ritualized algorithm or have massed practice for reinforcement, but real problems with as many different approaches as there are individuals working to solve them.

From down the hall, the smells of freshly baked blueberry muffins from Yvonne's room and cookies from Vivian's room waft in and mesh with the snickerdoodles baking in

Bruce's room. The students begin to get antsy, and Bruce asks them to quiet down. They do for a moment, and Bruce, without looking up from the tangram problem in which he is as totally engaged as his students, comments, "Much more settled. Thank you, folks." The calm does not last long. Well over half the students are still actively working on their math activities, but each group has at least one student who is not working. The noise level is lower than usual, and as Bruce looks up he is disturbed to see two students in one group teasing each other.

Bruce is upset. "Can everyone come sit on the rug for a minute." As the two boys who had been teasing each other dawdle, Bruce becomes angrier. "Hurry up, we have to wait for you guys. You are not part of a separate group in here." As the class gathers, all but one of the students assume a serious air. Bruce is direct. "I can't disguise my disgust. There is an undertone of smart aleckness in here today." The one student smirks, and Bruce shoots him a glance. "It's not funny to me and if it is funny to you, then we have a very strong disagreement." The entire class is now silent. "You folks have to use your heads in here. When your sense goes out the window, we've got a problem because I can't provide sense for everybody. Come on now." As the students head back to their groups, he playfully puts an arm around the child who had been the target of his glance and shares a private joke. They laugh together, and the class goes back to work. As they do, five students return from a local Senior Citizen's Center. The home's clientele are primarily immigrants from Latin American countries. Each day the residents share a different "skill from the old country" with the visiting youngsters, including jewelry making, negritas, drawing, knitting, and wood-working. Today has been negritas, and a returning boy tells Bruce all about "these neat little dolls."

The snickerdoodles smell ready, and Bruce goes back to check with today's cook on the estimated feast time. In Vivian's room, the cookies are done, and the children are anxious to give the student teacher her surprise going away party. As the five and six year olds gather in a circle on the rug, Vivian gives her chair to the student teacher and sits with her community on the rug as the two chefs pass around their cookies. It is difficult for Vivian, like any adult, to sit on the floor. The ground, even when covered with a rug, is hard, cold, and covered with sticky bits of cookie crumbs which latch onto clothes. From the floor, one cannot see as well, cannot view the room omnipotently. If something demands her attention, it is difficult to rise quickly. Yet Vivian is consciously teaching her children something by sitting with them. She is like them, and this, she teaches, is how one treats other people and partakes of community.

A student speaks up without raising her hand and says she "wants to make a toast." Vivian reminds the class that if they want to make a toast, they "have to put their hands in the air." The children, without exception, make toasts. They give the departing student teacher a CPE 1 T-shirt and a book that captures in picture and captions the work they have done together. The student teacher, her eyes welling with tears, makes the final toast: "I want to make a toast to all of you who have made this a special year for me." When asked if she will come back, the student teacher responds that she has to go to another school to

learn some things from other children, but that she will definitely come back before the end of the school year.

As the party progresses, Lucy, the director, comes in to talk with Vivian. They are still seeking the elusive videotape for the student teacher meeting. Vivian is also heading up a multischool effort analyzing and developing better assessment and reporting mechanisms for children's language development (reading, speaking, listening, writing). Lucy is passing on information about a meeting for the week following the winter holiday. All of their business is transacted in Spanish. As with Vivian's decision to sit on the floor, this is conscious and intentional. The sight of a Spanish-speaking woman director speaking Spanish with an Anglo teacher is meant to send a powerful message to students regarding the value CPE 1 holds, and which they expect their students to hold, for traditionally disempowered groups.

The party and the children's school day end concurrently. After Vivian spends a few moments with children on the playground to make sure everyone is safe, she returns to the director's office where the staff is gathering.

3:00 - 5:00 PM

Every other Monday the CPE 1 staff meets from 3:00 to 5:00 PM for a Descriptive Review. (See Appendix.) Today the staff is going to participate in a description of David. Ten-year-old David entered CPE 1 under somewhat mysterious circumstances in the middle of the fall semester. None of the major players in David's school life -- neither David, his family, nor the CPE 1 staff -- had the chance to go through the normal CPE 1 entry process. David's family did not visit the school with a set of directions and an observation form to help them understand what CPE 1 tries to do. David himself did not visit the school nor did he chat with students or teachers. Neither David nor his family heard the group presentation about the school or had a personal interview with the director. Neither David nor his family articulated why they wanted to enter the CPE 1 family. David was not only in a strange, new environment; he was more of a stranger than is usually the case at CPE 1.

As with any new student, David's teacher Donnie gave special attention both to making David feel welcome and to providing experiences that allowed Donnie to assess David's strengths and figure out ways to build upon them. These included observations of classroom behavior, careful analysis of what David said and did -- his actual "work" -- as well as the more traditional tests and test-like events. Donnie also began "endless meetings with David's parents, several talks with the psychologist, and getting as much as I could from Lucy." Still Donnie was frustrated. He felt he was not meeting David's needs and found himself at a loss over what to do. The biggest signal to him that he wasn't meeting David's needs was that he began to question why David was "getting under my skin"; he began to sense that perhaps his own needs were compromising his ability to help meet David's. It was then he decided, "I need help."

Donnie decided to present David's case in one of the Monday staffwide meetings. Over the course of the past several years, faculty members felt the Monday meetings had become either global or had "degenerated into crisis management." This year, however, the school collaboratively decided to return to its prior practice of using the Monday meetings for a Descriptive Review either of a child or of a curriculum unit.

The Descriptive Review process evolved at, and has been disseminated primarily through, the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont (Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, 1986).

> The primary purpose of the Descriptive Review of a Child is to bring together varied perspectives, in a collaborative process, in order to describe a child's experience within the school setting. An underlying assumption of the process is that each child is active in seeking to make sense of her or his experiences. By describing the child as fully, and in as balanced a way as possible, we begin to gain access to the child's modes of thinking and learning and to see their world from their point of view. To have access to that understanding of a child or children offers a guide to the education of the child's fullest potential. Recommendations can be made which draw upon and support the child's strengths, interests, and power to make and do things (Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, 1986, p. 26).

This approach, according to Donnie, helps keep him focused on which student needs are not being met. It also helps him to examine the child's behavior as carefully as possible (thus the importance of the variety of perspectives).

The guided process that undergirds each Descriptive Review begins with a presenter (usually the teacher of the child being reviewed) and a moderator (a colleague with little direct contact with that child). Prior to the meeting, the teacher takes time for focused observations in five areas: (1) physical presence and gesture; (2) disposition; (3) relationships with children and adults; (4) activities and interests; and (5) formal learning. The presenter shares an overview of these findings with the moderator, and together they either select a word that captures the essence of the child or develop a focusing question for the collaborative discussion. In David's case, Donnie and Alice (the moderator) selected "the perennial question, 'Is this the right environment for David?'"

The moderator begins the collaborative discussion by convening the session, giving essential facts about the child, and presenting either the "essential word" or the focusing question. If an essential word is selected, a "go-around" follows. In a "go-around," everyone sits in a circle, and each participant gives reflections on the essential word, one by one, in order, and without interruption. Since David's case started with a focusing question, the next step is Donnie's presentation of the child according to the five observational areas. In addition, samples of David's work are posted around the room to offer further evidence for understanding the child. Often during the presentation, other teachers glance to and from

the work and the presenter, seeking discrepancies and insights into what they are hearing and seeing.

To give a sense of the kind of data presented, the following excerpts from meeting notes, which are filed in the student's records and are considered "important documentation of the child," are included. (A right to privacy issue is raised by this practice. CPE 1 resolves it by following a simple guideline: "If anything I want to say in this process would embarrass the family, don't say it in public. But if it is important, tell the teacher in private.")

1. **Physical Presence and Gesture**
   large; moves awkwardly; doesn't fit in the way he moves; absents himself from all physical activity; reasonable small motor coordination.

2. **Disposition**
   difficult to read; has very guarded facial expressions; no middle ground of comfort in his gestures; sits still all the time.

3. **Relationships with Children and Adults**
   very much an observer; likes to watch but doesn't lead to his joining of activities -- even when invited; has some friends but not with the kids who are in the center of things; doesn't seek out other students; having a difficult time picking up all the ground rules; seems confused about what adults expect of him; sarcastic.

4. **Activities and Interests**
   wants to draw all the time. [Note: At this point, Donnie shared a painting done in art class. It was highly developed and quite obviously took a great deal of time, patience, and commitment to complete.]

5. **Formal Learning**
   low academically; example of reading back dictation indicated very slow developing reading; no sense of numeration with or without manipulatives; brought in 57 cents when he owed 75 cents and had no sense of either money or the mistake made; artistically has advanced perspective.

Next, the moderator summarizes the presentation. Alice summarized with three major points about David: (1) he has a confused sense of boundaries and transitions; (2) he has an impulse to see humor (based on description of sarcasm and comic elements in art work); and (3) he is protecting himself, but how is he guarded and what is he guarding? Next, the rest of the staff, in the same go-around fashion described earlier, asks focusing or clarifying questions. Following this go-around, the moderator summarizes again.

At CPE 1 the focusing or clarifying questions rarely involve labels or even conceptual

frameworks of development or learning. Instead, the questions always relate to other children they have shared or to other concrete problems they have faced together. A researcher sitting in on this meeting immediately found himself classifying the child as a spatial learner with verbal problems whose history in school environments only validated the verbal. Not once did anyone use these terms, until the researcher's turn in the go-around; there followed a polite, if somewhat stunned, silence before moving on. It was not that the group was unfamiliar with or unable to understand either the terminology or the concepts; rather, they considered this an inappropriate time to leap to the kinds of conclusions inherent in applying labels. The purpose of a Descriptive Review is to give a rich description of the child as a whole person, not a reductive analysis. They were trying to understand David and wanted to keep focused on the here and now of David in CPE 1, on his strengths and whether they could develop them -- not pigeonhole a child into an abstract construct.

In some ways, this clarifying go-around is the soul of the process. It forces the presenters to "hear" their attitudes about the child reflected back. A teacher, describing the value of the process, noted, "The fish is the last to see the water, you know." Donnie, in this instance, interrupted the process, shaking his head, "Oh no, that's not the kid at all. He's not really like that. It's just that I am at a loss about what to do academically." Afterward, Donnie said the most important thing he got from this go-around was that he "was focusing on deficits." Though many of the clarifying questions revolved around understanding the troublesome aspects of David's behavior, Alice's summary centered on David's artistic ability and whether or not he was fitting in as well as other new CPE 1 students.

The final step in the initial child review meeting is another go-around focusing on suggestions for ways of working with the child and ways that each of the staff (not just Donnie) might help meet the child's needs and support the teacher. These suggestions are then summarized by the moderator. These were the central recommendations about David: (1) remember that he had only been in the school a short time; (2) have high but realistic expectations for him; (3) remind him of those expectations gently but consistently ("If you don't know the rules, it's not very fair to expect you to be able to follow them."); and (4) build curriculum around his strength in artistic work.

Donnie followed these recommendations by having David write a "Garbage Book," a series of drawings of imaginary characters who live in garbage cans; take dictation on stories about those characters; and read his book to many different audiences. As David spent more time in the school, was more explicitly informed of expectations, and felt his teacher's new patience, he began to feel that he and his work were more valued. Donnie felt David had become "more comfortable in the CPE 1 environment, warmer, more open, and less guarded. I've been trying to do more things to get him involved. I played ball with him the other day, and he is really quite good." In addition, "He has shown lots of math progress." (Aside: Given the researcher's spatial/verbal labeling he was very glad to hear this corroborating evidence of his hypothesis! It was, however, an assistance, not a labeling focus, that enabled Donnie to work constructively with David.) The Descriptive Review

refocused Donnie on David's strengths and enabled him to see more possibilities in David as a person. Donnie stopped being negative; he realized his own problems were getting in the way of his teaching; he played catch with David. In the process of seeing another person's worth, Donnie and the other teachers expanded their own understandings and perspectives on themselves as people as well as teachers.

David did not suddenly and miraculously fit in, and Donnie still has concerns. As a prelude to possible program changes, Donnie is seeing that David works with the school's student support team. He is also talking to David's parents about the possibility of other programs. A problem is that some of the better alternatives for David are found only in private schools. Perhaps the major source of guidance and support for Donnie in the months following the Descriptive Review has come from CPE 1's director, Lucy. Donnie has met with her almost weekly for a half hour before school and feels that she is "incredibly supportive in helping my work with David and helping me avoid feelings of failure."

The final step in the Descriptive Review process as practiced at CPE 1 is a follow-up session several months later. In this session, to which an entire two-hour Monday meeting is dedicated, the original presenters give a five-minute informal overview of what has happened since the first presentation. The overview is followed by a go-around where teachers once again share support and wisdom with the presenting teacher.

CPE 1 teachers feel the Descriptive Review process is "essential to the school program." "We are peers," said Donnie. "We really do have a support system. We all feel responsible for the kids because we know them. It is so helpful to know these kids in the hallway and public spaces. It allows us all to look out for them in a supportive way." The teacher support system embedded in the Descriptive Review process is non-judgmental, which reduces the threat of sharing. One's difficulties are not personal failures but growth opportunities for the whole staff. "It doesn't mean," said one teacher, "that we all agree, that's not the point." Teachers see the process as problem solving, not competition or confession. As at all schools, CPE 1 teachers have egos, and there is an undertone of competition among them. The Descriptive Review, however, provides a structure and a process that help transform some of that inevitable competition into cooperation toward mutual goals. While the Monday meetings are time-consuming, they are an incentive for professional practice. Teachers often describe them as "sacred." "Teaching can be so isolating," notes Donnie, "that I really look forward to Mondays. They are intellectually stimulating and help the week go better. I enjoy the chance for relations with other adults."

Children benefit enormously from the Descriptive Review process. In the case described, Donnie feels the process clearly helped him not only with David but with other students in his class. Another teacher commented that by "looking at one child more closely, I really end up looking more attentively at all my children." A second teacher agreed: "It gives me a new sense of the possible." In response to this, Alice nodded her head, commenting, "All humans are a mystery and finally unknowable. Isn't it wonderful!"

CHAPTER THREE

FEBRUARY WEDNESDAY

7:15 AM - 12:00 Noon

Wednesday broke brilliantly with an almost springlike feel, and Bruce takes his time getting to school. He has several concerns on his mind and knows that he needs time to sort through them. Foremost is the amount of time he spent on the family progress reports. The three boys in his extended family await. They were a little worried when Bruce did not arrive at his regular time, but just as the sun's heat caused them to shed their coats, their concern melted. Hopping up and down the steps and playing catch with their coats, they come to an abrupt halt when they see Bruce round the corner. They sprint off to hurry him along.

Shortly after the boys get their board game out, Bruce's student teacher arrives. Bruce does not expect his student teachers to arrive at the crack of dawn with him, but this one tries to get there as early as she can. She is not a morning person but eagerly attacks the opportunity to talk with Bruce and ask him questions about why he does what he does. Last week the topic for the Thursday morning schoolwide student teacher's meeting was why CPE 1 teachers set up their rooms the way they do. It seemed obvious to the teachers that their conception of how students learn demanded meeting areas, independent work spaces, and rooms chock full of "junk," but the connection was less clear to the prospective teachers, most of whom remember classrooms arranged in rows. Ever since the meeting, the student teacher has been asking Bruce follow-up questions. Bruce responds to each question with a concise, practical, and educationally reasonable reply.

Student Teacher: Why don't you use an overhead?

Bruce: I've always thought the overhead takes away proximity. It's like you're saying 'Take your eyes off what you're doing and put them up here.'

Student Teacher: Why don't you allow hats in school?

Bruce: Kids hide behind them. They start out on their heads and end up covering their faces. Not every time, but we make it *carte blanche* just so we don't have to deal with it.

Bruce feels an adrenaline rush when he hears his students approaching from the cafeteria. Home responses to the family progress reports, into which he poured his soul, should be arriving today. As with most of the CPE 1 staff, Bruce's relationships with parents are strong. Parents choose to send their children to the school, attend frequent family conferences, and receive personalized weekly newsletters. Still, there is a fragile tension. When Alice looks for the cracks, she sees the need for better parent relations. Tonight, Yvonne, Alice, and Vivian will attend a work session with parents on improving school-home communication. At the moment, the issue is not an abstract idea, but has the

immediacy of sweaty palms and butterflies doing a blue grass stomp in Bruce's stomach.

The first child in the door brings back the home response form. (The family report to which the note responded is included in its entirety at the end of this chapter.) The family responded positively. Bruce allows himself a small congratulatory smile before diving headlong into his day.

Down the hall, Yvonne is asking her class to choose which of the following books they would like her to read aloud: ***Annie and the Old One*** (Asian); ***Little Lou*** (African American); ***Dream Wolf*** (Native American); ***Jafta, The Journey*** (African American); ***How My Parents Learned to Eat*** (interracial marriage); ***Strega Nona*** (European); ***Pretend You're a Cat*** (interracial); and ***Whose Hat*** (gender stereotyping). The children choose ***Whose Hat***, and Yvonne begins, the book open to the children as she reads.

All is not smiles in Yvonne's room. Four-year-old Michael is having a difficult day. Things did not go well at home, and they are not going any better at school. He gets overwhelmed, and without telling anyone, he leaves the group and heads out the door. Yvonne, mindful of her responsibility to the community, has the paraprofessional read to the group. She then rushes to the hallway filled with worry. When she catches up to the child, she shares her worry without a hint of condescension or insincerity. "This is *very serious -- very dangerous*." She takes him to the office, where he and his family, like all the students, are known personally by Lucy. Lucy sits with him on her couch, and they begin talking with each other.

Yvonne returns to her class where she holds an impromptu class meeting. Taking advantage of the teachable moment and the students' real concerns about their friend, she addresses the group. "Michael was having a hard time," she begins. The problem she somberly presents for the students to think about is not the child in question, but the larger issue of leaving the group and the room. "You could wander into the street, and I would never know where you were." From student questions, she senses their concern for their friend and so spends a few minutes talking about what is happening with him now. "He is in the office. His mother will be called." She is not angry with him, she explains, just drained by her fear and relieved that he is okay. She explains the incident and her actions, but, more importantly, she shares her emotions and thoughts. In doing so, she affirms her students' emotions and thoughts. She is feeling and thinking aloud, honestly and openly modeling her humanity with the members of her classroom community. Yvonne is not presenting herself as an unfeeling, omniscient authority, but as a feeling human being like her students. She is revealing CPE 1's sense of humanity to her students: you have to be passionate in order to be compassionate.

Reading in Alice's fifth and sixth grade classroom today is calm compared to Bruce's stomach and Yvonne's worry. On other days, Alice is in an uproar. Several weeks ago on a field trip, Alice's class had almost gotten into a rumble with a group of high school students outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Slight, salt-and-pepper-haired Alice had found

herself in the position of fending off two groups of boys, whose individuals towered over her. CPE 1 is a "real" school -- every day children and teachers must cope with crises. But today Alice is working quietly with a six-student literature group discussing ***Tuck Everlasting*** by Natalie Babbit. Alice positions herself so that she can peruse the room in a glance, and she does so every few minutes.

For the most part, the independent readers seem to be silently engaged. As with Yvonne's room, the choice of books reflects opportunities to learn about other cultures and other ways of living: ***Child of the Oleo, Treasure Island, Island of the Blue Dolphins, Helen Keller, Pharaohs and Pyramids, Russian Fairy Tales, Before Freedom,*** and ***48 Oral Histories of Former North and South Carolina Slaves.*** Some of the children have selected their own books, others had their books selected for them by Alice. One child, in memory of Roald Dahl who has died recently (and whose picture is on Alice's classroom door), is rereading some of his books. One pair of girls has drawn the majority of Alice's glances as they seem to be more intent on socializing than reading this morning. After several glances have failed to stop the socializing, Alice reminds them that they should have finished their books by now and be in the midst of recording them in their reading logs.

Meanwhile, a group of visitors, one of hundreds each year, has entered the room. Alice introduces them to her class and reminds the class that they can ask any of the adults for help if they need it while she is with the literature group. One of the visitors had worked with Alice 15 years ago as a student teacher. Now she is preparing to be a principal and has come to visit CPE 1 as part of her training. Children feel free to follow Alice's suggestion, asking the visitors for assistance and sometimes just for their attention. As the reading period ends, Alice writes homework questions on the board for the literature group and reminds everyone to record their reading for today before taking out their journals in preparation for writing right after lunch.

1:00 - 3:00 PM

Today during writing time in Alice's class, the children are working in groups. Alice moves from table to table, stopping at one to ask the group to help the writer by discussing her last paragraph. She sits for a moment with another group to work through a sentence rewrite with them.

At another group of three, one of the children starts to explain his story. A girl across the table asks him to read it instead of explaining because she wants "to get to know your main character by hearing him." The rest of the group listens attentively as the writer shares his work. He is interrupted by one of his editors commenting that the story moves too fast for her. Alice, who has joined this group, asks for suggestions. Ideas for improvement come flying from the group. The writer selects two that he says would help his story. The second writer begs the group for a delay. "I want to write some more before I share." The third writer has written seventeen pages in the past two weeks but now needs

help wrapping it up. Her peers do not want the story to end. They ask her to read it to them again from the beginning. She complains that they have already heard it, but the group is adamant. The plot of the story revolves around two crickets who immigrate to America in a picnic basket. After arriving in America, they experience prejudice because they are a different shade of green than native American crickets. As she finishes reading, the group responds positively ("It's so good!") and offers suggestions for several further episodes -- each of which eventually becomes a chapter in her book.

It is also writing time in Dot's third/fourth grade classroom. The children are writing independently, as usual. For several months, ever since the staff review of David, the new boy in Donnie's class, Dot has been brooding about Leo, a new boy in her class, and his writing. For six months he had been writing page after page of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle stories. Fluency was not a problem; some of his stories ran to twenty pages. But there was never a trace of the personal. In December, Dot had been ready to push him in this direction, but after the Descriptive Review of David, and the realization of the difficulty of adjusting to a "strange environment," she became hesitant. Perhaps, she thought, he needs more time to become secure within CPE 1 before I hold him to the same expectations I have for students who have been here their entire school life.

Leo, though new to the school this year, entered under more typical circumstances than David. Dot knew, for instance, that he had been considered both a behavior problem and a slow learner at his old school. She saw few traces of either problem in her classroom, but she was not satisfied. She wanted Leo to learn to make sense of the world, to construct reality from the dense collection of sensory data that constitutes experience. This is what writing is all about in Dot's room. Although the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles stories provided an opening for Leo to learn the technical skills of writing, they did not provide an opening for conscious construction of reality. Her dilemma was whether to wait for him to take the risks needed to make sense of the world or to insist that he take those risks. Since he wouldn't dare move beyond Ninja Turtles, when should she dare him? "The teacher's job," Dot feels, "is to figure out how long to allow the child time for safety -- and if the child doesn't move on his own to risk, to say, 'Now is the time for you to risk. I insist.'"

Today, Dot's patience pays off. Leo begins a new story. He writes: "A kid hit me. I hit him back," and then looks intently out the window. Dot walks by and says, "What a great beginning. I'm really anxious to hear what happens." He writes nothing more during writing time. Dot, however, is quite excited. She decides she will "make him finish it. It's time for me to make a choice, to make the adult decision that he's ready." She smiles resolutely as she strides past Bruce's room on the way to the Wednesday staff business meeting.

Every Wednesday, punctually from 2:15 until 3:00, CPE 1 holds a business meeting for the entire teaching staff. Each meeting has a theme, usually selected and publicized in advance. One teacher is chosen to chair the meeting and another to be the scribe. Minutes of the meetings are placed in a notebook in the director's office where anyone can read them.

The teacher leader opens the meeting with a brief overview of the theme and some possible ways to address it, followed by a go-around where the rest of the staff shares their feelings and thoughts on the theme. The presenter summarizes the discussion and makes a proposal for further action, usually one arising from the discussion. The group then chooses among three alternatives: (1) schedule another discussion of the issue; (2) assign responsibility for a specific action to be taken; or (3) drop the issue. According to several teachers, no issue has ever been dropped. Lack of time is an inevitable frustration. Comments Alice, "We never ever get to do all the things we want to do, feel responsible for, think about."

The themes of the business meetings are restatements of CPE's essential curricular question: What messages are students and staff receiving from their life in CPE 1? The following is a list of the actual topics for the first semester of the 1990-91 school year and suggested topics for the second semester.

Actual Topics

scheduling teacher preparation periods
curriculum descriptions (brief explanations from each staff member of what, how, and why they teach what they do)
homework policy
mainstreaming
children with special physical needs
literacy and language skills
community

Suggested Future Topics

close reading of narrative reports to families
multicultural emphases
community
fundraisers
children and drawing
areas of dissonance between parents and school
assessment of development
understanding parental concerns

At the same time, there is a human and social flexibility to the Wednesday business meetings. Several weeks ago, Lucy unilaterally decided the staff needed a go-around where each individual could say what she/he was feeling. She made this decision after hearing several faculty members arguing outside her door over who should get to see her first. She figured that when the adults were arguing among themselves it was inevitably affecting students. The staff understood what she had done and why, but Lucy felt the need to explain (not apologize) to an outsider who had been present at the session: "Meetings like that are an important part of running a school."

The comments from that go-around were meaningful and personal. The staff, like

student writer Leo in Dot's room, was attempting to construct a reality from the mass of sensory data in which they felt they were drowning. The staff's concerns fit into three general categories: (1) the kids' and their disrespect for each other and for the staff and how, in response, some teachers felt they were becoming tyrants; (2) a world that is irrational (e.g., the war in the Gulf and how it makes them feel; kids growing up before they are grown up); and, (3) from non-classroom teachers, relationships between their programs and mainstream school life.

There were complaints -- some of which could have been perceived as letting off steam -- but it was much more than that. Because the process gave everyone a chance to think about what they wanted to say, to hear what the others said, and to think about the relationships between how they were feeling and how others were feeling, the meeting was not just a gripe session. Tensions were released with laughter. Often the laughter was "silly" -- inappropriate because what they were saying was tragicomedy and not slapstick, or because the teller was not laughing. Sometimes the laughter was appropriate -- reflecting the teller's choice not to cry. When Alice, for instance, pantomimed the behavior of her class warring with the class of high school kids at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the staff laughed uproariously with her.

Regardless of the responses, however, the meeting transcended a gripe session because of its structure and because the staff cared too much about each other to let inappropriate responses alter their predominating professionalism. Lucy summarized masterfully:

> There are some things we cannot control. We came here because we didn't like what was out there. The world may be crazy, but in here we don't have to be. When those kids are with us here, we need to think about what we can do. What is important and how we can help kids use their empowerment wisely. What we have is children misguided in their empowerment. We need some childlike behavior from all of us.

Today, however, the general emotional tone of the school seems secure, and Dot smiles at Bruce as she passes. "Don't be late," she reminds him. Bruce leaves his classroom and walks down the hallway to Lucy's office where the business meetings take place. A student passes by and Bruce stops him: "Hey, tomorrow's your birthday!" They share a smile. A second child stops him. "I don't have enough research to write my article." Two more children ask Bruce for ideas on where to sell tickets to their "diner," an ongoing fundraising effort for their spring camping trip. Bruce asks a few questions and breaks away to stop a young student passing by. "Your writing is so beautiful," he says and then subtly interrogates the child about a fight that had occurred after school several days before. "Who would want anyone to get hurt?" he asks before moving on. He quicksteps past Lucy's door to ask another student about the health of his father who had been mugged. An observer jokes about the difficulty of getting anywhere quickly, and he responds, "Just taking care of business."

The particular business meeting Bruce joins is continuing to discuss last week's topic -- community. At the previous meeting, the staff had decided to begin working on community in individual classrooms and to bring their concerns and ideas about classroom community to the follow-up meeting. Lucy interrupts a five-minute introduction to inform the staff of a crisis. She has to leave but promises to return and report on the crisis before the group disperses. Staff members often tell outsiders that the most important way to learn about CPE 1 is to watch how they handle a crisis. Like most functioning schools, to an outsider, the school seems to be in constant crisis.

Lucy returns as promised and describes the crisis. It revolved around Chris, a troubled and troublesome eight-year-old boy who had not "grown up with the school"; this was his family's first year. He had refused to follow a disciplinary order from the playground supervisor. The class had misbehaved on the playground and the adult on duty (not a teacher) had penalized the entire class by having them line up against the wall. Chris, arriving late on the playground, felt that since he had not been present during the group's misbehavior, he should not have to accept the group's punishment. Unable to force Chris to comply, the playground supervisor became frustrated. Forgetting the school policy to contact school-employed parents only in their roles as employees, he summoned Chris' mother, an employee in the building. Chris initially refused his mother's command and when he finally complied, she became even more upset with his attitude.

"Wipe that smirk off your face!" (SMACK)
"WIPE THAT SMIRK OFF YOUR FACE!" (SMACK)
The smacking continued until she drew blood.

Lucy reminds the group "You all know the mother. You know how hard she is trying. She just felt horrible. And Chris, well, he was in the right, wasn't he?" Both mother and child had been publicly humiliated by the most important people in their lives in front of the most important out-of-home community they shared.

Because he had been the subject of a Monday Descriptive Review, the staff knew Chris, his strengths, and how the school was trying to build upon them. They also knew the parent. As the incident is shared, each teacher shows anguish -- from flowing tears to clenching and unclenching fists to shoulders so tight with tension they visibly throb. But no one places any blame for the situation.

The significance of the crisis was not how it was handled (a cooling off period for everyone involved) nor what structural action was taken as a result (a reminder of the existing policy concerning the dual roles of parent and employee). The significance was what CPE 1 considered a crisis: the pain of an individual family. The essence of the response was compassion; at that moment, every person in that room felt the pain of others.

CPE 1's business -- whether expressed as topics for business meetings, how one teacher "takes care of business," or the significance of a crisis -- is humanity: helping

students and teachers express it through the life they share together.

7:00 - 9:00 PM

CPE 1 classroom activities that serve to affirm the human qualities of each student demand new assessment and reporting mechanisms. In addition, as one parent put it, CPE 1's "recognition that the family environment is the most important educational one" demands new structures and processes for the school to learn from the home. Tonight's meeting is the initial session of a three-year project attempting to deal with three issues: (1) new student assessment mechanisms; (2) new reporting mechanisms; and (3) new structures and processes for home-school communication. CPE 1 is undertaking this project with the other member schools of the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE). Each school in the CCE network had the option to participate. The only criterion was that a consistent team from each school (a parent, a teacher, and an administrator or administrative designee) complete at least the first year of the project. A majority of the CCE schools are represented, and there are some interested observers from other schools.

At tonight's introductory meeting, each participant is provided with a copy of ***The Primary Language Record: Handbook for Teachers*** and a brief article by Myra Barrs, a developer of the Primary Language Record (PLR) and the session's featured speaker. The PLR was developed in Great Britain by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in response to a government directive to "develop a standardized report card." It is a systematic, informal, descriptive recording/reporting instrument based on teacher, parent, and student judgments culled from daily life in a variety of environments. In order to help understand student growth and to communicate progress, ILEA wanted to develop a "report card" that reflected rather than distorted good practice and that conceived of language as talking, listening, reading, and writing. In addition, the developers of the PLR wanted the report card to include naturalistic assessment, not just from the primary school teacher, but from parents, the student (no matter the age, ability level, or native tongue), and all school personnel who worked with the child. Ultimately, the developers of the PLR hoped it would become a tool for better understanding of progress and development, improved ability to describe a child's strengths and progress, and increased awareness that assessment is not an end in itself but an opportunity to base teaching and parenting on "richer" data.

The initial purpose of the three-year project is not to implement the PLR in the participating schools but for them to take stock of what they are currently doing. The process and product of the PLR are to be used to help focus time and energy. It is typical of CPE 1 staff to utilize the work of outsiders to strengthen their own practice. They know good educational practices are not replicable, but must be created. They also know, however, that there is no need to reinvent the wheel, only the particular size and axle needed to run most smoothly for them. If Myra Barrs has helped create a wheel, they take a look at what she did. Similarly, CPE 1 continues to adapt Pat Carini's work (from which the Descriptive Review is derived) to their own needs. In fact, the PLR materials, like the

Descriptive Review, were devised *in order* to be used by schoolpeople to understand, teach, and assess students. Because these materials are simple and sensible (like a wheel), they are also flexible enough to be adapted to meet the specific needs of particular contexts. CPE 1's Descriptive Review is not exactly Pat Carini's, nor will their eventual parent reporting process and format be the PLR. The roots, however, will be clearly recognizable and attributed to their proper source.

After Myra Barrs explains the PLR and how it was developed, a parent asks: "How do you know if it is working? Have you evaluated the effects of this report card with a control group? How do students in PLR schools do on tests compared to non-PLR schools?" Yvonne listens carefully to this parent, catching his eye as he finishes to let him know she would like to talk with him.

A teacher from another school asks, "How do you get the parent to comply?" Another comments, "It's a good idea, but it won't work in my school because I am the only one who wants to do it." These kinds of responses are variations of three common responses at conferences touting "new" educational thinking:

> We are already doing that.
> We tried that and it didn't work.
> That won't work with our kids.

There is nothing new or experimental about what CPE 1 does with children. It has been "trying out" many of the "new" educational ideas for over a decade. CPE 1 teachers have tried, refined, agonized over, and discarded other ideas. Inevitably, however, they see the need to do more. Tonight the comments of the CPE 1 participants primarily refer to what was omitted from a videotape of a student-parent-teacher conference shown as part of Barr's presentation.

> Why did the teacher intervene at that point? [What came before?]
> How did the teacher respond to the child's response? [What came after?]
> Did more kids respond to this type of question than the other types? [What happened in other contexts?]

These are "practical" questions, but they are not "how to" or "what do you do" questions. Instead, they are questions arising from the teachers' own experience. Barr's answers will be assimilated into their current practices, or their current practices will be accommodated to make room for the answers. Either way, the PLR's answers, though probably similar, will not be CPE 1's answers.

As the meeting ends, the three CPE 1 teachers fan across the room to follow up informally with people who raised questions and concerns. Alice seeks out the teacher who said she was the only one at her school who wanted to try it out. They discuss "the shock of time" needed for change and the value of efforts "to put the child in a whole social context

and not succumb to the labeling of decontextualized skill deficits." Vivian talks with the teacher who wanted to know how to get parents to comply. Vivian says, "Who is holding the pen, who is asking the questions, is very indicative of power relationships." If you really want to open up the school, she maintains, you have to shift those power relationships.

Yvonne seeks out the parent who wondered how they knew if the PLR really worked. Through a series of questions, she draws from him what he thinks schools are for and how he thinks those kinds of outcomes could best be measured. Their discussion continues out the door, down the hall, and onto the street. As the February night air chills and the other participants have caught the bus or driven away, the two still stand on the school stoop, learning from each other. It is 9:30 PM. Bruce's extended family will be waiting for him before the sun rises again.

CENTRAL PARK EAST 1

1573 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10029 Tel: 212 860-5821

Lucy Matos,
Director

Larry Spiegel
Ass't. Director

February 1991

Dear _____:

_____ is a wonderful, intelligent young person, but she doesn't seem happy and she is often detached from the rest of the children in class. She isn't grumpy, the way I saw her at times early in the year. She is cooperative and hard working. She shows her concern in the class by taking care of the pets. She is a diligent worker and reads with a passion, as long as she can read about horses. But she seldom works well with other students; this is okay sometimes, but it isn't okay when she should be getting help and giving it in her math group. For a long time, the only person _____ could go to for help in math was me. That means there is a breakdown in the relationships with other students; this is a problem because students learn not just by what they do but by what they share with other students. So, seeing herself as a part of a classroom unit (as a person who can accept help from and give help to other students) I think is an important mini-goal for the rest of the year. A couple of other goals I have are: (1) get to school on time; (2) be here every day (unless there's an unavoidable sickness); and (3) get all homework in.

_____ reads fluently. She had no trouble with any of the words when she read one of the Black Stallion mysteries with me. She didn't follow the punctuation in her reading, though, so she read through one sentence into the next. She has read all of the *Saddle Club* books, and a young children's book *My Father's Dragon*. (She likes children's picture books. It's good that we read regularly with Pam's class.) _____ became an avid reader once she started reading the *Saddle Club* stories; now, she will ask if she can stay up at recess to be able to read. I have to make arrangements with her for extra time to read so she will get to her writing (and she likes to write too).

_____ has written some very interesting stories in her journal this year. She has also written some downright scary stories about a group of wealthy kids who hang out together, with their chauffeurs and their "manchons" and who try to scare each other for kicks. Then, the scariness gets real when a murderer arrives. (Sounds a little like "Murder, She Wrote.") _____ is now writing her *Saddle Club* stories in her journal. She is developing her own characters and story lines. _____ writes very well; she can write in script and is a fairly accurate speller. But there are some problems: first, she is totally confused by homonyms. She writes "There not..." for "They're not..." She confuses "hear" with "here," "to" and

"too." There are little reminder devices that she can use to remember the differences (for instance, there's an "ear" in the word "hear"). But she has to focus her attention on this aspect of her writing. When children are beginning to write, we ask them to write out their entire ideas without stopping. We discourage them from asking for spelling or punctuation; when children stop, they lose their train of thought. But they also have to go back and look at their writing, in order to check spelling and punctuation once their ideas are on paper. _____ has to spend more time on this second aspect of her writing. In particular, I want her to focus her attention on words that she uses over and over (for instance, "answers" or "riding" or even "palm"). It would help her to develop a list of common words in the back of her journal, so she could refer to it and study it. I have been very impressed with other kinds of writing _____ has done: She wrote an excellent pen pal letter (of course, it gave her a chance to tell about herself and especially her love of horses), and her letter to Mayor Dinkins showed her social awareness and concern. I have also liked her math writing, where she has learned to write excellent word problems (in this case, about area and perimeter). Her questions are exploratory, creative, and thoughtful.

_____ is very good at seeing patterns and concepts in math. She has worked extensively with pattern blocks in figuring out fractional relationships. She has also worked on computing the area of triangles and on area and perimeter and drawing things to scale. She put a lot of work into her dream house scale drawing, which we then used to calculate area and perimeter. She has had a little trouble moving to paper and pencil calculations. We've worked with adding and subtracting fractions, finding the least common denominator, multiplying and dividing with canceling, etc. We've also done a lot of graphing and reading of graphs. _____ works hard, but I am hopeful that she will be able to get more help within her group.

____ has begun a number of projects but has had to move on to something else before she has finished. Early in the year, she worked with clay. Then, she began a diorama showing a maritime environment; the purpose was to show the damage done to wildlife by air and water pollution (_____ was especially interested in birds). She worked very hard on this project, using cardboard, papier mache, plasicene, and even wax. The diorama kept growing; eventually it engulfed a biosphere project that _____ and _____ were working on. Before I knew it, I had three large water bottles full of blue water, some of it still leaking in different parts of the room. Maybe the project got too big; maybe _____'s interest shifted. But the original diorama was never completed, nor was the biosphere. I'm disappointed because there was so much promise in both projects; and if they had been done more completely, they would have resulted in some very serious research. _____ has been working for several months on a model of an incinerator, the kind you'd find in an apartment building. She has used milk crates, cardboard rolls, aluminum foil, and string. She is now incorporating pulleys into her work.

She tends to work by herself, occasionally dropping around to see what other people are doing. She is a careful worker, always testing out different ideas and materials. Just before our second lunch sale, she got the idea to make place mats somehow representing the different countries. She got the encyclopedia and located the flags of various countries, and used co[illegible]ed paper to fashion flags, which we then laminated. They were very nice, and we used the ones that were finished for our sale (we've even kept them so we'll be ready for the next). Something got _____ upset during her work on this project, and she stopped working on it. I think it had to do with a disagreement among the people working on the project about how to do something. I hope that these things can be worked out; we need _____'s creativity.

The happiest and possibly saddest I saw _____ this whole year was around Halloween time. We had a wonderful time on our trip to Plattskill, New York and on the way back. _____ was very involved in the landfill (you could say she was almost up to her knees in it) and on the hayride, where we picked up pumpkins to bring back with us. Once we got back to school (this was around 3:30), a group of us cleaned out the pumpkins and started making the school fair. _____ was very involved. She had an idea for the class party to create a haunted house and stayed up when the class put on its production of "Phantom of the Opera." She never quite had enough time to get set up, and the party began. She really wanted to try it, out, and I wanted her to have a chance after all of the work she had done. But nothing worked as planned. The kids waiting in the hallway grew impatient; only one student could go in at a time. It was just one of those things, but I think that _____ was disappointed; and I haven't seen her take a chance the way she did with the haunted house since. I think part of the problem is that we all have ideas about the way things should be done, and we want our ideas to work out. This makes it hard to listen to someone else's opinion and to compromise; then when something doesn't work out, we feel crushed. I hope _____ will take some more chances. She has a wonderful imagination and so much spirit.

_____ is not confrontational as she sometimes was at the very beginning of the school year. But her friendlessness is a sign of lack of trust of other students, and ultimately of her own likability. She has worked with _____ and _____; I would think they are friends, and that's a beginning.

I'm looking forward to a happy rest of the school year,

Bruce

CHAPTER FOUR

VALUES

Running like a current just beneath the preceding narratives are values that CPE 1 explicitly articulates and consciously incorporates into the culture of the school: (1) a conception of the nature of humanity; (2) a conception of knowledge and knowledge construction; and (3) a conception of teaching and learning. These three values are exhibited in the commitments, norms, and behaviors of individuals as well as the school as a collective entity. Though abstract concepts, they are enacted through personal interactions. Conceptions of the nature of humanity, knowledge and knowledge construction, and teaching and learning are inseparable in the school's day-to-day existence, only separated here for analytical purposes. These values are ideals and therefore difficult to achieve, yet everything that happens throughout the day at CPE 1 is mediated by them.

Nature of Humanity

CPE 1's conception of humanity is based upon trust of and respect for the individual within a community and takes into account Carini's (1988) warning to "Be careful how you interpret humanity. It *is* like that." This inclusive view is expressed educationally in the school's vision that respected and trusted human beings of any age want to learn. CPE 1 believes that each individual encompasses the spectrum of human possibility; that each individual has the drive and capacity to make sense and meaning of experience. In addition, the CPE 1 community believes that all human beings are capable of, indeed responsible for, creating environments reflecting that vision. The essential element of such environments is the unassailable respect inherent in the director's belief that, "Everyone is brilliant at some things." In the words of a former teacher, "A school has to be more than a place for just skills -- you have to nurture the soul of the child."

CPE 1's vision of humanity applies to the school staff as well. If the ultimate goal is that to nurture the soul of the child, the ultimate curricular material is the soul of the teacher. Both must be nurtured. The paradox is, to nurture the soul of the child, "teachers must be valued." In the words of the current director, "The school has to be for the professionals *and* for the kids." Thus, every vision of student development has a parallel vision of adult development. Just as Bruce made the time for six students on the way to a staff meeting, the director at CPE 1 assumes a personal responsibility to "get to know each staff member as an individual."

CPE 1's human values of passion and compassion are taught and monitored with conscious intent, both formally and informally. With so many emotional, psychological, and physical equivalencies of wind and rain, which over time erode a child's psyche both in and out of schools, such intention is necessary if children and staff are to realize their vision of humanity within their school lives. Two teachers capture the essence of the Descriptive Review process in discussions with an outsider:

It's the commonality of humanity that makes it work. By talking about one child, we're learning about all children -- and about ourselves.

The value is in the widening perspective. The reason for all those meetings that drive us crazy is to widen our world. The wider the world, the better the life. We are trying to live the "Good Life."

There is a danger of both mystifying and trivializing what CPE 1 is by using a grandiose phrase like "inclusive vision of humanity" to describe the school. Members of the CPE 1 community are not saints. They get mad, make mistakes, get tired, and complain. In many ways, CPE 1 is just like any other school. There are tensions between administrative roles and teaching roles. Some days teachers wonder how everything could have totally fallen apart. When you look at how the staff treat one another and the students, however, you see a consistent attempt to enact their values. Listen to how they hear complaints and overcome that first universal sense of defensiveness. Observe how they reprimand students. CPE 1's humanity is a day-to-day practical way of being with students, of trusting and being trusted, of struggling with the inevitable tensions of school life that constantly test the notion that people can and should be trusted and respected.

Not all schools share CPE 1's commitment to the innate possibilities of each individual. At the opposite end of the continuum is the Hobbesian belief that the natural state of humanity is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. If people cannot be trusted, the usual prescription is to impose fearful discipline, to imprint civilization on the beast residing within the individual. This potent belief is deeply engrained in American education. It runs from Puritan founders, through the nineteenth and early twentieth century cliche, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." It continues today in ritualized punitive schemes for controlling children.

A more moderate view is the blank slate conception of humanity: People are neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but rather become what their experiences make them. This view, too, has a long history within American education, exemplified by behaviorism and its diagnostic-prescriptive spin-offs.

Many schools profess a trust and respect for all people. CPE 1 struggles to manifest that vision in its practices with children and adults. When there is a problem with someone, the individual is not seen as the problem; rather the issue is whether and how the CPE 1 environment allows the individual's gifts to grow.

If there is a problem with an individual teacher, it is always dealt with individually, with the goal of "leaving the teacher with respect." For instance, a young teacher's unhappiness was showing. Lucy intuitively asked, "How do you feel about your work? Where would you like to be in five years?" Not: "You are failing. You will improve. You will do these seven specific things, or you will be fired." It was the teacher as a person, a member of the community, who was contacted, not a malfunctioning worker in a

technological nightmare. Approached in such a manner, the teacher could acknowledge his own soul, his own unhappiness. He could admit, without losing face, that he did not think he was cut out for teaching; he could say that perhaps this school environment was not the place for him to utilize his talents. The CPE 1 community's trust in teachers is exemplified by its ongoing investment in teacher knowledge rather than administrative monitoring or external experts; on some professional development days, the staff spends the day talking with each other.

The Descriptive Review session described in Chapter Two is one example of the same values at work with children. The purpose was not to stigmatize the child with a label, but to enrich the teacher's ability to build on the child's strengths. The question was not, "What is wrong with David?" Rather, it was "Is this the right environment for David?" This led to strategies for changing the classroom to build on David's strengths, not remediate his weaknesses.

There are many other examples of CPE 1's values in action. A lottery ensures equal ethnic representation among its students so that the school can enact its trust and respect for all people. The school site was intentionally located in a "fringe area" (an area accessible to different socioeconomic classes) so that class and ethnic integration could be realized. Classroom experiences are based on student interests and strengths rather than externally imposed content standards. Simple but telling is Yvonne's "private teacher closet" that remains open to students who want to look at themselves in the mirror and be told they are "Looking good today."

Knowledge and Knowledge Construction

CPE 1's core value of an inclusive passion and compassion for humanity is paralleled by its vision of knowledge and knowledge construction. If people are viewed as both capable of and responsible for who they are and what they become (e.g., are trusted and respected), then knowledge cannot be conceived of in either narrow behavioral terms or reductionist categories of "intelligence." Instead, knowledge must be premised on the "broader human impulses to care, to seek worthwhile experience, and to make sense of experience" (Carini, 1986, pp. 23-24). Knowledge thus conceived requires a shift from the notion that it is received to the perspective that it is constructed -- and the most valuable knowledge is embedded in the "strength, potential, and worth of persons, both individually and collectively" (Carini, 1986, p. 23).

The type of knowledge that drives CPE 1 must be actively constructed by individuals within a social context (see Vygotsky, 1962). In this way, the uniqueness of the individual perspective, as well as the power of collective thought generated by diversity, are equally respected (Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, 1986). In plain English, nothing makes any sense to me until I make sense of it. But the sense I make of something, the knowledge I construct, is dependent upon the people and things around me --

the sense they make of it and how I can explain my understandings to them. Although I have to make my own sense of my life and the world around me, this process is enriched by and enriches the knowledge constructions of others. Paradoxically, an individual and inherently personal quest for meaning extends one into the public arena of values and standards.

At CPE 1, these epistemological notions are concretized by holding individuals responsible for their personal construction and use of knowledge. As Bruce explained to his students, "When you throw your sense out the window, we've got a problem because I can't provide sense for everybody." Yet the activities arising from and resulting in the construction and use of knowledge are inevitably embedded in, and thus affected by, the CPE 1 social environment. Behavior, as Lewin put it, is a factor of the individual personality and the environment. Thus, there is a constant and healthy tension between individual and group activities, assessment and accountability. If all human beings are exceptional, then everyone knows enough about something to help each other. Members of the CPE 1 community are responsible to themselves as individuals but also to the group. Even when students are working individually, for instance, they publicly acknowledge what they will be working on.

Knowledge construction is the work of students and teachers. CPE 1's vision of the student as active worker is supported by the work of Lillian Weber, Pat Carini, and Debbie Meier and is melded in the tradition of progressive and open education. The mindset is captured by Bruce's reprimand to students: "Get yourself active. I can't stand to see you vegetating." Rooms are rarely silent; they buzz with actively working and engaged people. In a primary classroom, one might observe several boys baking banana bread. Each boy stands in front of a mixing bowl, one hand holding the directions while the other stirs. Each boy follows an idiosyncratic method of scraping the runny dough from his bowl to the pan he is sharing with another. One explains the right way to do it: "You use two spoons, and you scrape the mixture off one using the other." The second boy follows his own drummer, nonplussed by his partner's admonishments. "Oh no! We forgot to grease the pan," remembers one. Calmly they empty the dough back into the bowls and together wash the pan. As with CPE 1 writ large, the boys are working alone and together simultaneously.

The parallel structures for students and teachers can be understood by the phrase "learning-centered school." Teachers, as much as students, are expected to be the active constructors of knowledge. Everyone at the school is expected to be learning. After years of work, the staff and the parent community are still, individually and collectively, working to understand their needs better and to create more sensitive classroom practices, conceptions of accountability, and communication, as evidenced by their participation in the PLR Project. Teachers and parents are actively working to construct tentative answers to put to the test of practice. The knowledge the CPE 1 staff is seeking is not easy to create. It is the hard questions, including questions of self and school, which they consider the most worthwhile. As Alice once wrote, "Teaching is a lifetime process of learning, and, therefore, a lifetime process of change."

Teaching and Learning

CPE 1 combines its vision of humanity with its understanding of the nature of knowledge and knowledge construction in the way teaching and learning are carried on. The universal human process of and capability for actively taking in and applying the mind to experience underlie teaching and learning at CPE 1. Teaching and learning depend upon the view of people as "*active* in making sense and order of the world and their place in it; *active* in seeking connection and relationship with each other; and *active* in the pursuit of worth" (Carini, 1987, p. 1). Teaching and learning are thus dependent upon an environment in which children can be "active and persistent in the making of meaning, order, knowledge, and standards" (Carini, 1988, p. 32).

Throughout CPE 1, curricular terrain and the paths provided through that terrain consistently enact this conception of teaching and learning. "Curriculum choices" occur in almost all CPE 1 classrooms. One way to characterize those choices is that they are holistic, interdisciplinary, and begin with the student's needs, interests, and desire to make sense of the world -- not a predefined set of skills in a preestablished disciplinary field of inquiry. In reading, that translates to a whole language approach using literature rather than basal readers teaching isolated skills. In math, manipulatives are used to help students make sense of their world rather than only learning facts and algorithms. The writing process emphasizes making a sensible reality from one's own experiences and then being able to share that reality with others. Projects integrate disciplines, engage interest, and arouse passion. They wed content with the developmental needs of children. For instance, younger children tend to focus on the more immediate and concrete world; as children grow, their projects reflect a greater ability to understand the past and the faraway.

Skills and facts are valued by teachers and learned by students, as witnessed by Bruce's report to parents in Chapter Three. His students, like all students at CPE 1, are working on such basic skills as spelling and computation facts. The difference is that the acquisition of such skills and facts begins with each individual student's experience, needs, and interests, not the skills and facts themselves. CPE 1 believes that as human beings attempt to give meaning to their experience and to share that meaning with others they will learn important facts and skills. CPE 1 has faith in the value of facts and skills; CPE 1 believes that they are also useful tools for making meaning from the world.

The preceding discussion of CPE 1's curriculum choices does not -- and cannot -- fully represent what CPE 1 is. What the CPE 1 community does is not as significant as *how* it does it and how it *thinks* about it. To define the community as its curriculum choices is to make a learning-centered process into a product, to "de-mean" the very essence of the school. This reduces the arduous struggle for vision realization into "We do the writing process here." Even though the writing process is a fine curriculum tool, it does not make CPE 1 a special place. CPE 1 is a good place for people to meet their human potential because of how the school thinks people should be treated and how it thinks people learn. Though perhaps ultimately indistinguishable, curriculum choices are what CPE does, not

what it is.

Curriculum and teaching in CPE 1 reflect its vision of humanity and its conception of knowledge. If both teacher and student must be passionate learners, then classroom activities can be neither teacher-directed nor student-directed; they must be both. CPE's teaching and learning are more accurately reflected when teacher and student interest and control are combined as in the following diagram. CPE 1 falls in the upper right quadrant where both student and teacher direction is high (Bussis, Chittenden, and Amarel, 1976).

CHILD CONTRIBUTION HIGH

TEACHER CONTRIBUTION LOW	Students decide	Students and Teachers decide	*TEACHER CONTRIBUTION HIGH*
	External sources decide	Teachers decide	

CHILD CONTRIBUTION LOW

If students and teachers are both learners, and learning demands passion, then both students and teachers must be engaged in constructing the classroom environment. The general CPE 1 principle is that both students and teachers have an interest in, direct the flow of, and control the nature of the curriculum. The result is that both teacher and student can be passionate about what goes on in classrooms. A good example is the homework questionnaire developed by Alice's class. Both Alice and her students were interested in the homework issue, jointly directed the flow of activities that led into and through the parent survey, and shared control of the eventual nature of the homework assignments. Former students credit much of their subsequent success in schooling and early adult lives to the opportunity that CPE 1 gave them "to be good at something." They learned to be passionate about learning and as a result continued to do well in school and in other social environments that many of their peers were unable to navigate successfully (Bensman, 1992).

The staff believe that respected and trusted human beings of any age want to learn. Therefore, it is the school's role and responsibility to figure out how to assist everyone's efforts. The first component of that is to provide an intellectually rich and emotionally secure environment in which children and adults can choose from a variety of equally

acceptable activities. The second component is to provide the freedom to experiment along with the discipline to generate hypotheses. In each classroom described in Chapters Two and Three, there were both limits and choices for students, many defined by the students themselves. In a sense, when both students and teachers generate and make choices, one can never pinpoint an answer to who really builds the curriculum. In fact, when students and teachers decide together what will be taught, how it will be taught, and why it will be taught, the question rarely arises.

The interactive relationship among trust, risk taking, and sharing is an essential element of CPE 1's conception of teaching and learning. The ability of CPE community members to take risks, to try new things, to build theory, and to construct novel knowledge arises from the belief that trusted and respected individuals want to learn. Trust and respect provide the safety net above which CPE 1 performs educational feats -- feats considered too risky by many educators. CPE 1's pedagogical performances have attracted a national audience hoping to watch and to learn how they too can become stars. A steady stream of visitors flows through CPE 1. The CPE 1 community (including parents and students) often attends and makes presentations at workshops. In the midst of this, they strive not to forget that knowledge can only be constructed, not given. Conference presentations and other networking activities are seen as "professional enlargement," as opportunities "to test out our stuff." The CPE 1 community, whether it be one student assisting another or a teacher presenting a workshop at a national conference, resists the tempting notion that they have the answers if only people would listen. To do so would be to deviate from their core values.

CHAPTER FIVE

ORGANIZATIONAL THEMES

The integration of values into the total life of the school differentiates CPE 1 from other schools, even those holding similar values. This integration is enhanced by a set of organizational themes played out in school and classroom life: (1) adaptability; (2) permeability with the external world; (3) enabling roles; and (4) accountability supports. These themes are best exemplified through organizational-structural mechanisms that create an environment in which the school's values can be consistently enacted. They create a school culture propelling the community closer and closer toward the realization of its ideals. They allow CPE 1 to be a flexible model rather than a constraining mold, a place where values are enacted in a uniquely individual fashion.

Adaptability

In simplest terms, adaptability is the ability to change. Change, however, is never easy. It involves a never-ending struggle to craft, articulate, and live a vision. School change is the quest to understand and realize the school's purpose. CPE 1 structures this quest into the marrow of the school through processes that push differences to the surface and by creating the time and knowledge needed to resolve the conflicts constructively. The staff meets weekly for its business meeting. Every other Monday, they meet for the Descriptive Review Process. Twice a year they have full-day retreats. At each of these occasions, the purpose is not scheduling, or district forms, or announcements, but two essential questions: (1) Are we *really* a learning-centered school? and (2) What messages are we *really* sending? The questions demand that the community collectively articulate what they are trying to do; probe beneath the surface to determine how close they are to doing it; and figure out ways to do it better. The "*really*" is a challenge to confront themselves and combat smug coziness.

On one districtwide staff development day, the CPE 1 staff decided to spend the entire day together. Lucy, as director, introduced the topic of the day: "How do you want to change next year? How does what you want to do personally affect the whole school, the rest of us?" The staff then engaged in a go-around where each had the opportunity to answer those questions. An exchange from that meeting provides the best example of how the CPE 1 staff challenges itself.

> **Larry** [assistant director]: The staff doesn't know what goes into the administration of this school. There is an overall lack of picture of the whole process. This expands into the whole school, and it's a weakness. Maybe each teacher ought to take one hour a week on an administrative task. You see, the big picture gets separated when you guys are so into the passion of your class curriculum. The strength of the school is also the weakness of the school.

Alice: We don't all know the kids as well as we once thought we did. And that's a problem. It leads to disrespe ..

Dot (to Larry): Can you come into the classes more often?

Larry: I don't have a minute. The staff does not know what allows them to pursue their passion. The flip side of the good side has to always be looked at, or we separate ourselves within ourselves and between ourselves. I mean, do you feel the same worry-pressure-harriedness for the other roles in the school?

Dot: We never say "NO" in this school. We never say "Tough -- that's enough" and we have to.

Alice: We impose it on ourselves more than any principal anywhere ever would. Thirty years of teaching and still always wondering if I've failed.

Bruce: Is there some way to ritualize the getting to know everybody? ... Never saying no creates martyrs, and martyrs don't last long. Voluntarism becomes dangerous. But underneath that is a teacher/other split and I don't know how to resolve it. I've tried to streamline what I do, but it just keeps getting longer. (to Larry) We're not counting minutes, it's just too much. We can't do any more.

Lucy: As much as we meet, our communication is never sufficient. For us to be supportive, we need to know what's going on. We have shifted our focus. We've lost track of building on strengths. We have to start focusing on the things we each do successfully. I know I am not as supportive as I need to be. I know we have to stop the volunteerism, but we have to determine what's important to our school community to help us determine what to say yes to and what to say no to. I feel that I've failed you when you say "I didn't want to bother you -- you are too busy." Relationships with the central office and the other administrative stuff are important, but not as important as you and your classrooms.

Perennial school conflicts such as the balance between congratulations and condemnation, between the small community of the classroom and the larger community of the school, between helping others and saving oneself, and the tension between teacher and administrative roles were all forced into the open by the structure and process of the meeting. They were raised personally as well as institutionally and the room was thick with intensity. Yet the concern was always for the students, their families, and for each other. The conflicts could be constructively resolved (always only for the time being) because of an overarching common goal. Though concerned with the people, the conflicting parties separated the people involved from the issues involved. Alice, for instance, does not get

defensive and attack when told that teachers do not get the big picture. Rather she acknowledges the problem and is troubled by it: "We don't all know the kids as well as we once thought we did." As a result of Alice's response, Larry can then develop his worry without degenerating into finger pointing: "We separate ourselves within ourselves and between ourselves."

The conflict served as feedback for the group, which Lucy then utilized to raise the question of protective safeguards and incentives: "We have to stop the volunteerism, but we have to determine what's important to our school community to help us determine what to say yes to and what to say no to." The core, however, always remains the same -- the community's vision of humanity: "We have shifted our focus. We've lost track of building on strengths. We have to start focusing on the things we each do successfully."

The CPE 1 community is strong enough that it does not need to establish external enemies or mask internal differences to maintain cohesion. It is strong enough to disagree, to use conflict to change; strong enough to let the warts of its internal workings show even though those warts have been used against them in the past. This ability to adapt is not accidental; it is an intentionally structured and consciously developed characteristic of the school. Painful though it may be at times, adaptability is indispensable because it is essential to the program's success with students.

Permeability with the External World

No school can be successful in realizing its vision without productive interactions with external people and institutions. These relationships are particularly essential when it comes to parents, district bureaucracy, and the surrounding community. In each, there are three possibilities: the school can communicate *to* the other, the other can communicate *to* the school, or the school and the other can communicate *with* each other. Given what CPE 1 stands for, it is hardly surprising that it strives for communication *with* the external world.

School life, however, tends to constrain open and honest communication with the external world. Many forces support the formation of an isolated in-group: time demands; the stressful ambiguity of not knowing whether one is succeeding; the never-fully-acknowledged sacrifices teachers make for their students; the low status, power, and financial rewards of school-level educators; and the overchanging directives from the centralized bureaucracy. It is a constant challenge to transcend these forces and avoid an "us versus them" mentality.

CPE 1 deals with the difficulties and tensions of communicating with the external world in an intentional and ongoing manner. At the institutional level, the school was purposefully located in a fringe area in order to attract a heterogeneous student clientele. As the school made a name for itself, it could have easily filled its classrooms with children of upper-middle-class professionals; instead it designed an admissions system based on a

complex lottery process to ensure access to neighborhood children and a cross-section of all other applicants. The entire school, and each classroom within it, is intentionally representative of the heterogeneity of New York City in its students' racial, social, and economic backgrounds.

Since the formal curriculum is grounded in a culturally mixed student group, it is consciously multicultural. This, in turn, enables classroom activities "to let the outside in." As a result, students and staff are forced to face the tension of differences, to construct their own understandings of the value of differences. They are engaged in respecting both their own backgrounds and the backgrounds of those quite dissimilar from their own. Alice's fifth/sixth grade class, for instance, developed a unit on "Families." Children diagrammed their families; these reflected both a wide variety of backgrounds and of conceptions of family and family history. Later in the unit, the class expanded their study to the origins of names. Students did not research the English kings or "great American names," but rather the New York City telephone book to identify common names, to uncover their origins, and to explore the immigration patterns evident in a common artifact like a phone book. In short, these activities intentionally incorporated the heterogeneity of New York City into the school experience.

CPE 1's inclusive conception of humanity and knowledge construction creates an inevitable tension. On the one hand, CPE 1's vision of humanity requires a belief in the value of *all* constructed knowledge. On the other hand, the staff, like most teachers, were educated by and still live within the mainstream. How can they acknowledge, respect, and teach what they do not know, what they have not lived? Additionally, while the individual processes of knowledge construction may be accorded equal respect, not all outcomes of those processes are equally accepted. Those that undermine the school's values are rejected -- e.g., if a teacher were to construct a model of child development leading to nothing but rote work on math worksheets for weeks on end. Rather, the school advocates those models leading to the use of manipulatives because they are more likely to contribute to the community's goals for its students. Likewise, a student's construction that hitting someone is the best way to get what she or he wants would simply not be accepted.

Parents, too, are intentionally included in school life. The reports sent home, the parent conferences, and the attempt to include parents in the staff review process are all efforts to communicate *with*, not *to* parents. As Vivian says:

> I always assume that it is my role to work on building the relationships with families. Sometimes it takes longer with some, but I want to know what their children talk about at home, what trips they have liked to take, how they spend time at home, what they like to do. When we have family conferences, it is because we all want to think together about a particular child.

Intense struggle and tension continue to arise from the school's attempts to create a better match between its vision of parent engagement in the life of the school and the reality.

In any school, let alone one as intentionally heterogeneous as CPE 1, parent and teacher values rarely match completely. Rather than dismiss, defend, or defile conflicting parental visions and values, the staff seeks ways to incorporate them into the school's classroom practices, conceptions of accountability, and communication mechanisms. Through the Primary Language Record project, the systematic, informal, descriptive recording/reporting instrument discussed in Chapter Three, they are creating methods for finding out what parents and children think about the school and, especially, what parents and children think about their own progress on what is important to them. Though the school has always had extensive family conferences, parents and teachers are looking at the process in more depth, seeking to refine conferences, and evaluating different assessment techniques and data. The staff and the parents are asking themselves, "How can parents understand the school and the school's notions of development? What do parents need and want? How are parent and teacher needs and wants different? How are they the same? When school and parent views are in tension, how can that tension be resolved constructively?"

Another aspect is that the school, in addition to recognizing its internal strengths, continually seeks outside expertise. The Descriptive Review process, for instance, was incorporated into CPE 1 after the staff attended workshops at the Prospect Center; worked individually with the skills involved to understand their own students more fully; and worked with the Prospect Center, and among themselves, to create a structure and a process appropriate for the CPE 1 community. Because the CPE 1 staff is expert in its own right, its relationship with external "experts" is a two-way street. They make presentations at conferences; much of the research emanating from CPE 1 is based upon teachers' articulation of their understanding of children, learning, and schools. The seriousness with which the CPE 1 staff approaches student teachers is another example of how CPE 1 shares its expertise. Bruce's careful explication of what he does and why is typical of the experiences student teachers undergo. When the CPE 1 staff felt that individual conversations were insufficient to the task of educating teachers, they began the Thursday morning schoolwide student teaching seminar taught by a different staff member each week.

An essential trait of CPE 1 is its constantly evolving, negotiated relationship between the inside and the outside. This gives the staff, like the students, many learning opportunities. CPE 1 intentionally lets the external world in; through exploring points of dissonance, they confront themselves. In the process, they construct knowledge and practice consistent with their vision of humanity. In short, CPE 1 staff are learners themselves.

Enabling Roles

For CPE 1 to work in harmony, formal and informal "enabling roles" have been created and are continually recreated. Of equal importance, people are prepared, selected, and supported so that they can fulfill those roles. Some of these roles carry traditional names such as teacher, paraprofessional, and clerical personnel. These traditional names, however, belie nontraditional functions. Teachers, for instance, are not considered

functionaries, responsible for covering a predetermined set of material with a group of students. Instead, teachers are considered to be at the apex of the educational enterprise and treated as such. As Lucy told the staff, "Relationships with the central office and the other administrative stuff are important, but not as important as you and your classrooms."

Teachers, as trusted, respected, well-prepared, and supported individuals, are responsible to themselves and to their students. They construct the curriculum with students and families. The teacher-student-family triad determines what is studied, how it is studied, and why it is studied. Thus, the center of the CPE 1 experience is the passion and compassion of individual classrooms. This conception of teaching carries with it a terrifying responsibility. There is no one else to blame, no system to hide behind, no excuses like, "Look, I can't do anything else chained to this text book, this curriculum, these children, this district policy." Sometimes when teachers find themselves free to practice their profession, they discover, in the words of a teacher engaged in similar school reform in the 1930s, "'This freedom...challenges and frightens us. I fear that we have come to love our chains'" (Aikin, 1942, p. 16). Though freedom is not easy, CPE 1 staff are helped by emotional and professional support from administrators and from each other.

Paraprofessionals and clerical help are encouraged to participate in the passion and compassion, the teaching and learning, that is at the heart of the CPE 1 experience. One of the clerical support people, for instance, teaches a Spanish class from 8:00 to 9:00 AM each morning. Her students consist of eighth and ninth graders as well as several CPE 1 teachers. This opportunity to teach and to construct a curriculum with students empowers her as an individual. This empowerment, she says, helps her appreciate not only "what CPE 1 is about," but also how she can help the school realize its vision no matter what specific task she is performing. This is typical of how support staff at CPE 1 are trusted and respected. This is one of the reasons why, as the assistant director says, "The overall purpose and direction are the same whether classroom teachers are involved or any other CPE 1 community member."

The most significant tension surrounds the role of the administrator. Traditional managing and monitoring are no longer primary administrative functions. With teachers at the top of the hierarchy, where does that leave the principal? How is responsibility played out in the "big picture"?

At CPE 1, the two main administrative positions are director (Lucy) and assistant director (Larry). Although they do not perform traditional managing and monitoring functions, they are essential to the operation of the school. One of their primary roles is to "hear" what teachers need. According to Lucy, "The best way to give support is to know what your needs are." As needs are discovered, a second key administrative role is to create space, time, expertise, and resources out of thin air in order to meet those needs. This may be as mundane as typing up requisition forms. It is also done through creative scheduling so that teachers have time to meet, to go into each other's classrooms, to share what they know with others, and in these ways to expand the sense and meaning they make of what they do.

Schools are inevitably limited by scarce resources, and CPE 1 is no exception. Thus, no matter how Houdini-like their actions appear to be, Lucy and Larry cannot always create something from nothing. As a result, CPE 1 staff put in extra hours both in and out of school. Bruce and the sun arrive at the school simultaneously. Yvonne talks with the parent late into the night. These are not isolated examples. The principle at work is that the more respect and trust are given to the staff, the more they give to the students. According to a former director, "If people needed to stay late, they would do it because they felt well-respected and taken care of. This builds the kind of camaraderie that a school needs."

A third key administrative role is emotional and professional support. Each member of the staff is seen as a person who needs caring, tending, defusing, and encouragement. Personal needs are acknowledged and cared for, formally and informally. The retreats, the staff "gripe" sessions, the planned personal meetings with staff members -- all are formal structures and processes for care of the individual. Informally, it is not unusual to see Lucy giving a foot massage to a teacher as he or she struggles aloud to construct meaning from experience or to articulate the intuitive sense of worth of an unhappy child. The personal can become messy. If, however, the goal of the school is to nurture the soul of the child and the essence of the curriculum is the soul of the teacher, the messiness of the emotional is unavoidable. Larry's unofficial designation at CPE 1 is "the thermometer of the emotional tone of the school."

While both professionally and personally supportive, Lucy and Larry do not coddle the staff. A fourth key administrative role is "keeper of the vision." In this role, they must push for growth, let dissonance emerge, and then use the arguing, guilt, turmoil, and perplexity to maintain constant improvement. During the staff development day, Lucy instigated conflict by probing into personal needs ("How do you want to change next year?") and forcing the personal to confront the social ("How does what you want to do personally affect the whole school, the rest of us?"). Lucy brought the conflict into the open and moved it in a constructive direction: "We have to stop the volunteerism, but we have to determine what's important to our school community to help us determine what to say yes to and what to say no to. We have shifted our focus. We've lost track of building on strengths. We have to start focusing on the things we each do successfully."

A fifth administrative function is to be a buffer between the demands of the external world and the staff, as well as among conflicting internal demands. The buffer role exemplifies the tenuous balance that CPE 1 administrators must maintain between pushing and protecting teachers. As a school, CPE 1 is torn between two often antithetical belief systems -- accountability to their own professionalism (i.e., the students and families they serve) and accountability to the bureaucracy. The staff must be protected from the exorbitant demands of bureaucratic requirements that oppose the school's professional vision of education; simultaneously, they must be protected from trying to do too much. For example one district-accountable support person who serves the CPE 1 community is often abused by her district level supervisor who tells her, "You've had a free ride for five years." The supervisor's very purpose, to standardize children, is antithetical to CPE 1's conception of

human nature and schooling. When staff are not buffered from these external pressures, self-imposed martyrdom can result. The district support person, after being reprimanded again by her supervisor, looked down in shame and said, "I feel enormously responsible when things go wrong." The guilt arising from "not doing enough" when it is humanly impossible to ever "do enough" is reinforced by the inherent anxiety and uncertainty of teaching. The pressures can lead to cynicism, burn-out, and departure from the field. As Bruce said, "Martyrs don't last long." Larry, the assistant director responsible for measuring the emotional tone of the school, is also responsible for protection. Lucy says of him, "He protects me from the outside world."

Yet some of the external pressures must be allowed through the protective buffer in order to push the staff in productive directions. No matter how tempting, teaching can never be allowed to become as comfortable as an old shoe because when the shoe fits, there is no room for growth. It falls upon the administration to know the needs of the school as well as the needs of the individuals. Sometimes the needs of the school mean that teachers, as valued individuals, must be pushed. This was Larry's purpose in telling the staff:

> There is an overall lack of picture of the whole process. This expands into the whole school, and it's a weakness. The staff does not know what allows them to pursue their passion. The flip side of the good side has to always be looked at or we separate ourselves within ourselves and between ourselves.

Although indispensable to the enactment of the CPE 1 vision, the administrative roles of listener, space/time creator, supporter, vision keeper, and buffer are not glamorous. The glamour resides with the teachers and children. Moreover, the roles are difficult and, to some degree, thankless. It is rarely easy or rewarding, for instance, to push a trusted and respected colleague for the good of the school -- no matter how personally and professionally handled -- nor is completing district requisition forms a particularly ennobling task. One effect of putting the teacher at the apex of the educational establishment is that becoming an administrator loses some of its appeal. Teaching well is the career goal of teachers in the school, not becoming administrators. In the words of an ex-director at a CPE school, "Being a director is not something we make people aspire to." It is also difficult to retain directors. As Lucy points out, "You lose when you leave the classroom. You are no longer one of them." Lucy spends as much time as possible with children and has teachers send student stories and pictures to her. According to teachers, "The kids feel free to show off to her, and we encourage that. We are always telling kids, 'Go tell Lucy what happened.' And they love to do that." Lucy talks with teachers about their classrooms to maintain her connection with teaching but, she says, "It is not the same. This job makes it difficult to keep learning as a teacher."

The problem is not trivial. There are few people with the skills and personalities to meet the demands of -- let alone thrive within -- nontraditional leadership. If schools like CPE 1 are to become more prevalent, then the issue of how to attract, prepare, support, and retain school level "administrative sorts" must be addressed.

Accountability Supports

The conscious intentionality with which the CPE 1 community goes about realizing its vision of a school recurs throughout this analysis. What makes CPE 1 stand out from other public schools is not the caliber of its staff or students, but the fact that both staff and students are allowed to be responsible for their own actions. This allows them to be responsive to the needs of the school and the human beings who inhabit it. The high caliber of the people of CPE 1 is the effect -- not the cause -- of the privilege and responsibility of being trusted and of being accountable.

At CPE 1, being accountable has three components that, when combined, form cyclical mechanisms for responsible and responsive practice. The first component is that the school community knows what it wants the school experience to be for students, teachers, and families and then creates structures and processes designed to reach this goal. Second, it continually assesses how close the school is to realizing its goals, using as many, and as diverse, feedback tools as possible. The school, as individual people as well as a collective group, must carefully analyze what happens and how it affects individuals and the group. Staff members do not confuse the important component of assessment for the whole of accountability. Third, there are safeguards and incentives ensuring that the information gleaned from continual assessment is fed back into the accountability cycle. Thus, the school increases the possibility of positive practices and outcomes and decreases the possibility of destructive practices and outcomes. In short, the third component of accountability is to do something with the knowledge constructed from experience to keep students, teachers, and families from falling through the cracks.

Two small examples of CPE 1 accountability cycles follow. First is the matter of administrative roles in a learning-centered school. CPE 1 wants teacher-student interactions at the heart of all school and classroom decisions. The Wednesday business meeting and the go-around process increase the probability that decisions will remain focused on the central purpose of the school and will never be made without the input of those responsible for carrying them out. Many other structures and processes support the centering of classroom experiences. The director meets with all teachers individually to find out how to meet their needs better and to offer personal and professional support. The use of resources (human, financial, and temporal) is determined, whenever possible, by the individuals who will be using those resources. When resource allocation must be determined schoolwide (e.g., scheduling, library funds), the staff decides at the Wednesday meetings. Teachers are responsible for selecting new teachers, preparing prospective teachers (through the Thursday morning student teacher seminar), and mentoring first-year teachers (through release time provided when the director covers their classes).

Feedback concerning how well these structures and processes support teachers and students has been very positive. Assessments of current student learning from observations, student products, and tests and test-like events support the notion that CPE 1 is moving on

the right track. The work of CPE 1 students holds its own against that of any other school community, even those with more resources and serving more financially privileged clientele. Interviews with CPE graduates who have now entered adult life reinforce this observation. Findings indicate that the program prepares its pupils for both future schooling as well as socially responsible citizenship. Pleased parents and a long waiting list to enter the school indicate that parents believe the school comes close to realizing its vision. The kinds of activities that occur in classrooms are indices that CPE 1 has managed to maintain high standards without succumbing to standardization.

The feedback from directors, however, has not been as overwhelmingly positive. Even though the director's role is essential to the operation of CPE 1, it is not reported as being rewarding. In short, as noted previously, recruitment and retention of directors in schools with educational visions like CPE 1's are problematic. This is where the third component of CPE 1's accountability comes into play. The CPE schools are involved in creating two incentives to recruit strong administrators. They are working with Bank Street College of Education to develop a new program to prepare new kinds of school leaders. A second project with Bank Street recruits excellent "progressive" teachers with interest in administration and prepares them through administrative internships at CPE. The schools have also implemented a safeguard called the "Directors' Roundtable." This group meets monthly and serves as both a peer support group and a problem-solving forum. The feedback, as well as the actions taken in response, have created new structures and new processes providing input and continuing the cycle of accountability.

The Descriptive Review process, another rich example of one component of an accountability cycle at CPE 1, keeps the school responsible and responsive to the value of each individual. (Other components of this particular cycle include building on personal strengths; the admissions process whereby students enter the school "known;" the narrative report cards; the small size of the school; the informal collegiality among staff members -- to name but a few.) The two hours set aside every other Monday help create an active learning environment by enabling the staff to increase the sensitivity of their own professional observations and assist in the case of a single child. Thus, the structure of the meeting time supports both teacher and student growth.

The Descriptive Review process is very specifically defined and adhered to. It starts by focusing the teacher's classroom observations on five categories: physical presence and gesture, disposition, relationships with children and adults, activities and interests, and formal learning. This is designed to help the teacher see the child as a human being of innate worth rather than as a collection of deficits to be remediated. Through sharpening one's observation skills on a single child, the enhanced ability to see is transferred to observations of other children. The improved understanding of the nature of children's strengths and development increases the likelihood of creating a classroom environment built on them. In David's case, following the Descriptive Review, his teacher built learning experiences around David's strength in drawing and, from there, moved into the appropriate developmental level of David's verbal skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

When the Descriptive Review process moves into the meeting, especially in the go-around, each attendee becomes an active participant. In growing to understand the specific child in question, she or he comes to understand the children in the classroom as well. Dot's participation in the review of David changed the way she saw the new child in her room. This in turn gave her the patience to let "real writing" emerge. Thus, the process of the Descriptive Review, like the structure, synergizes support for teachers and students, resulting in classroom environments where knowledge is jointly and continually constructed.

Both the preparation and collaborative phases of the Descriptive Review generate invaluable assessment information about teacher and student. In David's case, the feedback created by Donnie's own observations, David's work, and the comments of colleagues provided a rich portrait of David's abilities and predilections as well as possible pathways to further development. In addition, and from the same rich sources, Donnie received feedback concerning his own teaching. He gained a greater understanding of how his classroom environment is seen by students (e.g., that his and CPE 1's expectations could be confusing) as well as how he could adjust his own approaches to create a better fit with student strengths and needs (e.g., play catch with David to get to know him differently).

A holistic understanding of a child inevitably bumps up against family life. The feedback generated by numerous Descriptive Review processes (and all the other components of this accountability cycle) have led CPE 1 to improve the parent-school connection. Even though CPE 1 has numerous structures and processes designed to make parents active participants in the life of the school (e.g., structured school observations prior to entry, personal interviews with the director, extended narrative reports, family conferences at the family's convenience rather than the teacher's), feedback from Descriptive Reviews indicated parent and school were often not working in concert.

CPE 1 acted upon this information. One approach has been to include parents in the Descriptive Review process. CPE 1 staff members and parents traveled to Prospect Center to attend workshops on joint parent/school Descriptive Reviews. Already, several CPE 1 parents have participated in the process and are working with staff to create incentives to spread the word and attract more parents. One parent who participated said the most positive thing about the Descriptive Review was "the support I feel from the teachers." Another parent said the major benefit to her was how much more she knew about her child and "what a better parent that can make me."

The PLR project described in Chapter Three is an attempt to make sure that essential parental knowledge of children finds its way into the school. The reporting forms being developed cannot be completed without parent and child interviews. The process being created by parents, staff, and external consultants is designed to increase the possibility that home and school will share their understandings of the child rather than have teachers telling parents about their children.

In both of these examples it is noteworthy that the feedback from one area is used to

create new structures and processes in another. For instance, the staff review was originally adopted to serve teachers and students. Yet the new structure and process being created will primarily serve parents. In the case of the Wednesday business meetings, the original purpose was teacher support and evaluation, but feedback resulting from that process led to structures and processes for director support and evaluation. This kind of transfer indicates both effective communication within the CPE 1 community as well as integration of the various roles in the educational enterprise. Communication and integration are not accidental at CPE 1. Intentionally created structures and processes bring them about: size of school, admissions application and lottery procedures, and twice-weekly whole-school meetings, among others. Meaningful feedback is then systematically obtained from a wide variety of sources: what the staff talks about at their meetings and retreats, teacher observations, student work, and assessment from "external experts." Finally, CPE 1 "does something" with the feedback. The staff regularly challenge themselves to turn information into self-reflection and renewal: the staff development day donated to working through issues of teacher-teacher and teacher-administrator communication and integration, the staff retreats, participation in accountability projects, and networking activities. CPE 1 is thus constantly changing and constantly growing. At all levels, there exist interrelated structures, processes, assessment procedures, safeguards, and incentives to increase the probability that the school vision is realized and to decrease the probability that any member of the CPE 1 community will slip through the cracks.

Summary

CPE 1 holds a consistent core of common values about the nature of humanity and the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed. These values give rise to a conception of teaching and learning dependent upon an environment in which all learners are persistent actors in the dramatic tension between the construction of personal meaning and public standards. This notion of teaching and learning is then translated into individually expressed norms of school and classroom activities and interactions.

At CPE 1, these values are expressed in an organic unity because the organization consciously and intentionally supports their enactment in the interactions that constitute its daily life. Adaptability enhances the realization of values by consciously and consistently surfacing tensions. This, in turn, forces CPE 1 to continually recreate and reenact its values within the life of the school. This continual recreation is made possible, perhaps even demanded, by the two-way permeability of the school with the external world. Additionally, roles are built into the organization, and people within those roles are supported, so that the conflicts and demands created by continual recreation and give and take can be resolved constructively. Finally, CPE 1 has numerous mature accountability supports in place that hold the school responsible not just for what it is, but for what it has the potential to become.

EPILOGUE

THE FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER

Although the air still feels like summer, the mid-morning neighborhood bustle holds no children in its midst. The school year hums along, and the students' energy is pulsating in classrooms and hallways rather than on the street. The CPE 1 community is together again, and there is a paradoxical sense of things being the same but different. Since last spring, the secondary school and the elementary school have exchanged some classrooms so that all of the elementary classrooms are now on the first two floors. When I stop in to see Alice, I am towered over by high school students. Abashed, I walk down a flight of stairs to Dot's room to see how Leo is doing. Dot has retired, and Leo is too busy writing to even notice I entered the room. Somehow, even though teachers are the same and kids are the same, these teachers and these kids are not the same. CPE 1 is still CPE 1, but it is brand new.

Perplexed and insecure, I enter Lucy's office. In late June, the case study was sent to each staff member. By early September I had received feedback from everybody mentioned by name and many whose names do not appear -- with the exception of Lucy. The comments ranged from a brief "Fine, no problem," to five-page single-spaced comments, to two-hour phone conversations. The staff's comments were remarkably consistent. They wanted more credit given to others, especially Lillian Weber's Workshop Center at City College and the two other CPE elementary schools (CPE 2 and River East). They wished the language was a bit less glowing (it embarrassed them) and sometimes in plain English. Parts of the original version contained factual inaccuracies, which they corrected, as well as sensitive material, which they rephrased for me so that the integrity of the piece remained intact while protecting the innocent. Finally, they wanted a greater sense of the informal communication that constantly buzzes within the school.

Lucy and I had worked together over the summer on another project supporting a school in the early throes of restructuring itself into a learning-centered school. We talk about how they are doing, and she asks after my son, wondering if I had taken the time with him she had made me promise I would do. In a short while, she takes out her draft, and, after discussing the staff's comments, we begin to go over it line by line. Vivian joins us as we are reviewing the school's history. The two of them discuss, with increasing speed and volume, different perceptions of what "really happened." Then they laugh, "And we agree about what happened!" Throughout, students enter Lucy's office. Most share work of which they are proud but one third grader, face awash with guilt, tattles on a friend who had made a mess in the art room. They were to have delivered a message to the art teacher and returned to class. Since the art teacher was out of the room, the two girls had taken the opportunity to engage in a little mischief. Lucy takes care of it by giving both girls a sponge and charging them with the responsibility for cleaning up the mess.

As we speak, Alfredo, a seven- or eight-year-old boy, walks into the office with Roberta, the school's psychologist. Our conversation dies immediately in the face of his intensity. His brown eyes, wide with a grief full of terror, render us momentarily mute.

The psychologist tells us that his father died last night. Lucy and Alice leap to surround him in a three-way hug. He slumps down. Though he is standing, it is as if the hug were to stop, he would fall to the floor. Lucy walks him to the couch, and holding him on her lap, she rocks slowly to and fro. Lucy's eyes are moist, but his remain in shock, uncomprehending, wondering what he did wrong, what he can do, wondering where the meaning is. Lucy asks if he wants to stay at school or go home. He whispers he wants to stay at school. Together, the three school adults recall that Larry lost his father last year. He will understand and perhaps be able to help in a way they cannot. Alfredo stands of his own accord and, supported on one side by Vivian and the other by Roberta, walks to Larry.

Lucy, a little wobbly, phones Alfredo's home. Alfredo's life has not been an easy one. His biological father left the family when Alfredo was very young. Raised by his young mother, it was not until last year that he had a male in his home life with whom he could share a father's love, who played catch with him, who smiled with pride at family conferences. This is the man who had died suddenly the night before. Lucy hears that the family, not knowing how to break the news to Alfredo, had not done so yet. He had overheard their discussion of how to tell him, and this is how he knew his father was dead.

The case study does not seem very important to me anymore. I need air. I just want to get outside and walk the streets thinking of my father and of my son. But Lucy sits back down on the couch with me and continues to go over the work line by line. She does not come right out and say it but her attitude stiffens my resolve -- if you care about Alfredo and the tens of thousands of other kids like him, then you do your work, fulfill your calling.

We do not finish negotiating the meaning of what we saw last year, but Lucy is committed to spending her lunch hour with several students in the library. She rushes out, not wanting to keep the kids waiting, but it takes me a while to gather my belongings and my emotions before walking shakily through the halls and out to the front stoop. Once again the school is totally different -- this time not from last spring to this fall, but from earlier this morning to lunch time. The school will always be different, but I understand now why it will always be the same: the values of the school, and the efforts of the people within it to live and share them, remain unchanged.

References

Aikin, Wilford M. (1942). ***The Story of the Eight-Year Study: With Conclusions and Recommendations***. Adventures in American Education, Volume 1. New York: Harper Brothers.

Bensman, D. (1987). ***Quality Education In the Inner City: The Story of the Central Park East Schools***. Report to the New York Community Trust.

Bensman, D. (1992). ***A Retrospective: The Graduates of Central Park East 15 Years Later***. Paper presented at the 1992 American Educational Research Association nual Meeting, San Francisco, CA.

Bradekamp, S. (1987). ***Developmentally-Appropriate Practice***. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bussis, A., Chittenden, E., and Amarel, M. (1976). ***Beyond Surface Curriculum***. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Bussis, A., Chittenden, E., Amarel, M., and Klausner, E. (1985). ***Inquiry Into Meaning: An Investigation of Learning to Read***. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Carini, P. (1986). "Building from Children's Strengths." ***Journal of Education, 168***(3): 13-24.

Carini, P. (1987). ***On Value in Education***. New York: The City College Workshop Center.

Carini, P. (1988). ***Another Way of Looking: Views on Evaluation and Education***. North Bennington, VT: Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research.

Katz, L. (1989). ***Engaging the Minds of Young Children: The Project Approach***. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools (1989). ***Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century***. Washington, DC: Author.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1989). ***Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics***. Reston, VA: Author.

Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research (1986). ***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes: In Progress***. North Bennington, VT: Author.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). ***Thought and Language***. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Appendix

Descriptive Review Process

The primary purpose of the Descriptive Review of a Child is to bring together varied perspectives, in a collaborative process, in order to describe a child's experience within the school setting. An underlying assumption of the process is that each child is active in seeking to make sense of her or his experiences. By describing the child as fully, and in as balanced a way as possible, we begin to gain access to the child's modes of thinking and learning and to see their world from their point of view: what catches their attention; what arouses their wonder and curiosity; what sustains their interest and purpose. To have access to that understanding of a child or children offers a guide to the education of the child's fullest potential. Recommendations can be made which draw upon and support the child's strengths, interests, and power to make and do things.

The perspectives through which the child is described are multiple, to insure a balanced portrayal that neither overemphasizes some current "problem" nor minimizes an ongoing difficulty. The description of the child addresses the following facts of the person as these characteristics are expressed within the classroom setting at the present time. It may be useful for you to briefly describe a child you know well before listening to this process:

Headings and Questions for Preparing the Description of the Child[1]

1. **Physical Presence and Gesture**

   What are the characteristic gestures and expressions? How are these visible in the child's face, hands, body attitudes? How do these expressions and gestures vary and in response to what circumstances (e.g., inside and outdoors)?

   What is the characteristic level of energy? How would you describe the child's rhythm and pace? How does it vary?

   How would you describe the child's voice? Its rhythm, expressiveness, inflection?

2. **Disposition**

   How would you describe the child's characteristic temperament and its range (e.g., intense, even, lots of ups and downs)?

---

[1] These headings, and the Descriptive Review process, were evolved at the Prospect Center, North Bennington, Vermont.

How are feelings expressed? Fully? Rarely? How do you "read" the child's feelings? Where and how are they visible?

What is the child's emotional tone or "color" (e.g, vivid, bright, serene)?

3. **Relationships with Children and Adults**

Does the child have friends? How would you characterize these attachments? Are they consistent? Changeable?

Is the child recognized within the group? How is that expressed by others? Is the child comfortable in the group?

How would you describe the child's casual, day-to-day contact with others? How does that vary?

When there are tensions, how do they get resolved?

How would you describe the child's relationship to you? To other adults?

4. **Activities and Interests**

What are the child's preferred activities? Do these reflect underlying interests that are visible to you? For example, does drawing or story writing center on recurrent and related motifs such as superhuman figures, danger and rescue, volcanoes, and other large-scale events?

How would you describe the range of the child's interests? Which interests are intense, passionate?

How would you characterize the child's engagement with projects (e.g., quick, methodical, slap-dash, thorough)? Is the product important to the child? What is the response to mishaps, frustrations?

Are there media that have a strong appeal for the child (e.g., paint or blocks or books or woodworking)?

5. **Formal Learning**

What is the child's characteristic approach to a new subject or process or direction?

What does the child rely on to learn (e.g., observation, memory, trial and error, steps and sequence, getting the whole picture, context)? How does that learning approach vary among subjects? What is the child's characteristic attitude toward learning?

How would you characterize the child as a thinker? What ideas and content have appeal? Is there a speculative streak? A problem-solving one? A gift for analogy and metaphor? For image? For reason and logic? For insight? For intuition? For the imaginative leap? For fantasy?

What are the child's preferred subjects? What conventions and skills come easily? Which are hard?

Summing up, how would you characterize the child's strengths? The child's vulnerabilities?

Outline of the Procedure for the Descriptive Review of the Child

1. Chairperson convenes the session:
   - gives the names and age of the child to be reviewed.
   - the ages of any brothers and sisters.
   - describes the focusing question.

2. The teacher presenting the child portrays her/him according to the headings outlined on the previous page; the portrayal is usually uninterrupted.

3. Following the portrayal, the chair makes a short re-statement of the portrayal, calling attention to dominant themes running through the picture presented.

4. The chair asks for descriptions from other staff who have had the opportunity to work with the child or who made observations specifically for the purposes of the review.

5. The chair gives a brief account of the child's previous school experience, any important medical data, and any information supplied by the family for the use of the school.[2]

6. The chair opens the review for the questions and comments of participating staff.

7. At the close of the discussion, the chair restates the focusing question and asks for recommendations.

8. Recommendations are made by the participating staff.

9. Chair's final "pulling together"; critique, plans for follow-up.

---

[2] Unless the parent is presenting with the teacher, family data is used sparingly. If the parent is a co-presenter, the format for the review is adjusted. The outline for that is not described here.

This publication was printed on recycled papers.